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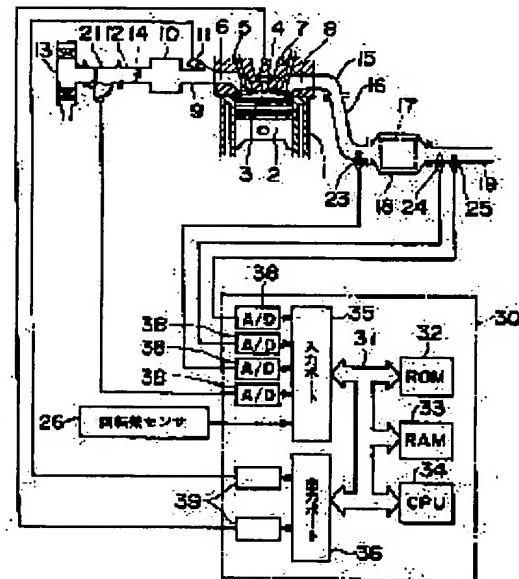
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(54) EXHAUST EMISSION CONTROL DEVICE FOR INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE

(57)Abstract:

PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To perform control of an executing timing of SOx desorption treatment of an occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst to an optimum value.

SOLUTION: This control device is provided in the exhaust pipe 16 of a lean combustible internal combustion engine with an occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst 17. In this case, an incoming gas SOx sensor 23 is provided upper stream from the NOx catalyst 17 and an outgoing gas SOx sensor 24 is provided downstream therefrom. Based on incoming gas SOx concentration detected by the incoming gas SOx sensor 23 and outgoing gas SOx concentration detected by the outgoing gas SOx sensor 24, an SOx storage amount of the NOx catalyst 17 is calculated, and when an SOx storage amount exceeds a given value, SOx desorption treatment is executed and when an SOx storage amount is reduced to a value lower than a given value during SOx desorption treatment, SOx desorption treatment is completed.



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CLAIMS

[Claim(s)]

[Claim 1] (b) The NOx absorber which emits NOx absorbed when the oxygen density of the exhaust gas which is formed in the flueway of the internal combustion engine in which lean combustion is possible, absorbs NOx and flows when the air-fuel ratio of the flowing exhaust gas is Lean was low, (b) A SOx concentration detection means for it to be prepared in the flueway of the lower stream of a river of said NOx absorber, and to detect the SOx concentration of exhaust gas, An exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means to control the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas to theoretical air fuel ratio or a rich air-fuel ratio when desorbed from SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber, (Ha) A preparation, the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine characterized by operating said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means based on the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected by said SOx concentration detection means.

[Claim 2] The exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine according to claim 1 characterized by to start Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust-air Air Fuel Ratio Control means when the SOx accumulated dose which was equipped with a SOx accumulated dose calculation means compute the amount of SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber based on the concentration difference of the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream and the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means, and was computed by this SOx accumulated dose calculation means reaches the specified quantity.

[Claim 3] The exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine according to claim 1 characterized by starting Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means when the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means is rising and the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream to a predetermined value.

[Claim 4] The exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine according to claim 3 characterized by to forbid Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust-air Air Fuel Ratio Control means when the SOx accumulated dose which was equipped with a SOx accumulated dose calculation means compute the amount of SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber based on the concentration difference of the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream and the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means, and was computed by this SOx accumulated dose calculation means is below the specified quantity.

[Claim 5] The exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine according to claim 3 characterized according to the magnitude of the SOx accumulated dose which was equipped with a SOx accumulated dose calculation means compute the amount of SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber based on the concentration difference of the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream, and the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means, and was computed by this SOx accumulated dose calculation means by to amend the Air Fuel Ratio Control conditions of said exhaust-air Air Fuel Ratio Control means.

[Claim 6] The exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine according to claim 1 or 3 characterized by ending Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means when the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means is descending and the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream to a predetermined value.

[Claim 7] The SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream is the exhaust emission control device of an internal combustion engine given in either of claims 2-6 characterized by detecting with the SOx

concentration detection means formed in the flueway of the upstream of a NOx absorber.
[Claim 8] The SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream is the exhaust emission control device of an internal combustion engine given in either of claims 2-6 characterized by what is presumed from an internal combustion engine's operational status.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[Detailed Description of the Invention]

[0001]

[Field of the Invention] This invention relates to the exhaust emission control device which can purify nitrogen oxides (NOx) from the exhaust gas discharged by the internal combustion engine in which lean combustion is possible.

[0002]

[Description of the Prior Art] As an exhaust emission control device which purifies NOx from the exhaust gas discharged by the internal combustion engine in which lean combustion is possible, there is a NOx absorber represented by the occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst. A NOx absorber absorbs NOx, when the air-fuel ratio of inflow exhaust gas is Lean (namely, under a hyperoxia ambient atmosphere). Emit NOx absorbed when the oxygen density of inflow exhaust gas fell, and the occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst which is a kind of this NOx absorber It is the catalyst which emits NOx which absorbed NOx when the air-fuel ratio of inflow exhaust gas was Lean (namely, under a hyperoxia ambient atmosphere), and was absorbed when the oxygen density of inflow exhaust gas fell, and returns to N2.

[0003] If this occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst (it may only be hereafter called a catalyst or a NOx catalyst) is arranged to the flueway of the internal combustion engine in which lean combustion is possible When the exhaust gas of the Lean air-fuel ratio flows, NOx in exhaust gas is absorbed by the catalyst. When the exhaust gas of SUTOIKI (theoretical air fuel ratio) or a rich air-fuel ratio flows, NOx absorbed by the catalyst is emitted as NO₂, and it is further returned to N2 by reduction components, such as HC in exhaust gas, and CO, namely, NOx is purified.

[0004] By the way, if sulfur content is contained in the fuel for an internal combustion engine and a fuel is generally burned with an internal combustion engine, the sulfur content in a fuel will burn and sulfur oxides (SOx), such as SO₂ and SO₃, will be generated. Since said occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst absorbs SOx in exhaust gas by the same mechanism as performing absorption of NOx, if a NOx catalyst is arranged to an internal combustion engine's flueway, not only NOx but SOx will be absorbed by this NOx catalyst.

[0005] However, SOx absorbed by said NOx catalyst is easy to tend be accumulated into a catalyst that it decomposes and is hard to be emitted in order to form a stable sulfate with time amount progress. If the SOx accumulated dose within a NOx catalyst increases, in order that the NOx absorption capacity of a catalyst may decrease, the rate of NOx clarification will fall. This is the so-called SOx poisoning. In order to continue at a long period of time and to maintain highly the NOx decontamination capacity of an occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst, SOx desorption processing is performed to a NOx catalyst, it is necessary to desorb SOx absorbed and the activation stage of this SOx desorption processing becomes very important.

[0006]

[Problem(s) to be Solved by the Invention] Here, there is a view which it has of the time of SOx of the specified quantity being accumulated in a NOx catalyst as one of the decision approaches of a SOx desorption processing activation stage. In this case, conventionally, the SOx accumulated dose absorbed by the NOx catalyst was presumed based on the mileage of a car, the NOx concentration difference of the inlet port of a NOx catalyst, and an outlet, or the temperature gradient of the inlet port of a NOx catalyst, and an outlet as indicated by the patent official report of a patent number No. 2745985 etc. That is, based on the direct data about SOx, the SOx desorption processing activation stage was not necessarily determined conventionally.

[0007] Therefore, grasp of the SOx accumulated dose absorbed by the NOx catalyst was inadequate, and there was a possibility that a SOx desorption processing activation stage might become unsuitable. This invention is made in view of the trouble of such a Prior art, and the technical problem which this invention

tends to solve is by managing SOx desorption processing based on the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas of the outlet of an occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst to continue at a long period of time and maintain highly the NOx clarification capacity of an occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst.

[0008]

[Means for Solving the Problem] This invention adopted the following means, in order to solve said technical problem. The exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention is prepared in the flueway of the internal combustion engine in which (b) lean combustion is possible. The NOx absorber which emits NOx absorbed when the oxygen density of the exhaust gas which absorbs NOx and flows when the air-fuel ratio of the flowing exhaust gas is Lean was low, (b) A SOx concentration detection means for it to be prepared in the flueway of the lower stream of a river of said NOx absorber, and to detect the SOx concentration of exhaust gas, An exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means to control the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas to theoretical air fuel ratio or a rich air-fuel ratio when desorbed from SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber, (Ha) It is characterized by operating said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means based on the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected by the preparation and said SOx concentration detection means.

[0009] Since the SOx concentration detection means has detected the SOx concentration of a NOx absorber lower stream of a river, the progress condition of SOx poisoning of a NOx absorber can be grasped exactly. And since the exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means is operated based on the SOx concentration detected by the SOx concentration detection means, optimal SOx desorption processing can be performed to a NOx absorber.

[0010] As an internal combustion engine in this invention in which lean combustion is possible, the lean burn gasoline engine and diesel power plant of the direct injection in a cylinder can be illustrated. The air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas means the ratio of the air supplied in the flueway in the upstream rather than the engine inhalation-of-air path and the NOx absorber, and a fuel (hydrocarbon).

[0011] When an internal combustion engine is a lean burn gasoline engine, an exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means can be performed with a means to control the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied to a combustion chamber. Moreover, when an internal combustion engine is a diesel power plant, a means to control the so-called subinjection which injects a fuel by the intake stroke, the expansion stroke, or the exhaust stroke, or the means which carries out supply control of the reducing agent into an upstream flueway rather than a NOx absorber can realize an exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means.

[0012] An occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst can be illustrated as a NOx absorber. An occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst is a catalyst which emits NOx absorbed when the air-fuel ratio of the flowing exhaust gas was Lean, NOx was absorbed and the oxygen density in the flowing exhaust gas fell, and returns to N2. This occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst makes an alumina support, and it comes to support at least one chosen from Potassium K, Sodium Na, Lithium Li, alkali metal like Caesium Cs, Barium Ba, an alkaline earth like Calcium calcium, Lanthanum La, and rare earth like Yttrium Y, and noble metals like Platinum Pt on this support.

[0013] In the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention, it has a SOx accumulated dose calculation means compute the amount of SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber based on the concentration difference of the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream, and the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means, and when the SOx accumulated dose computed by this SOx accumulated dose calculation means reaches the specified quantity, Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust-air Air Fuel Ratio Control means can be started.

[0014] case the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream is larger than the SOx concentration of a NOx absorber lower stream of a river -- the concentration -- it is possible that difference is absorbed by the NOx absorber. Therefore, if this concentration difference is multiplied by the amount of exhaust gas, the amount of SOx (SOx accumulated dose) absorbed by the NOx absorber is computable.

[0015] In the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention, when the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means is rising and the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream to a predetermined value, Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means can be started. It is because the SOx concentration of a NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream, and even if it does not compute the SOx accumulated dose of a NOx absorber, the progress condition of SOx poisoning can be grasped as the SOx accumulated dose of a NOx absorber

approaches a saturation state.

[0016] Moreover, when the SOx accumulated dose which was equipped with a SOx accumulated dose calculation means to compute the amount of SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber based on the concentration difference of the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream and the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means, in this case, and was computed by this SOx accumulated dose calculation means is below the specified quantity, it is desirable to forbid Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust-air Air Fuel Ratio Control means. Even if it operates an exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means in the condition with few SOx accumulated doses of a NOx absorber, it is because it cannot be efficiently desorbed from a NOx absorber to SOx but a reducing agent becomes useless.

[0017] When the SOx concentration of a NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream to a predetermined value and Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means is started in the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention It has a SOx accumulated dose calculation means to compute the amount of SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber based on the concentration difference of the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream, and the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means. According to the magnitude of the SOx accumulated dose computed by this SOx accumulated dose calculation means, the Air Fuel Ratio Control conditions of said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means may be amended. It is because there are optimal SOx desorption conditions according to the magnitude of a SOx accumulated dose. The Air Fuel Ratio Control conditions here are rich degrees, rich air-fuel ratio duration time, etc. of an air-fuel ratio.

[0018] In the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention, when the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with said SOx concentration detection means is descending and the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream to a predetermined value, it is possible to end Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means. When SOx is desorbed from the NOx absorber, even if it changes an exhaust air air-fuel ratio to Lean since rich before desorption of SOx is completed thoroughly, it is because, as for a period for a while, SOx is desorbed from a NOx absorber after changing to Lean. Thereby, the amount of the reducing agent used for SOx desorption can be reduced.

[0019] In the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention, the SOx concentration detection means formed in the flueway of the upstream of a NOx absorber can also detect the SOx concentration of said NOx absorber upstream, and it can also be presumed from an internal combustion engine's operational status. By taking into consideration the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream, the progress condition of SOx poisoning can be grasped with a more sufficient precision.

[0020]

[Embodiment of the Invention] Hereafter, the gestalt of operation of the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention is explained based on the drawing of drawing 8 from drawing 1.

[0021] [Gestalt of the 1st operation] Drawing 1 is drawing showing the outline configuration at the time of applying this invention to the gasoline engine for cars in which lean combustion is possible. this drawing -- setting -- a sign 1 -- an engine body and a sign 2 -- a piston and a sign 3 -- in an inlet valve and a sign 6, an inlet port and a sign 7 show an exhaust valve, and, as for a combustion chamber and a sign 4, a sign 8 shows [an ignition plug and a sign 5] an exhaust port, respectively.

[0022] An inlet port 6 is connected with a surge tank 10 through the corresponding branch pipe 9, and the fuel injection valve 11 which injects a fuel towards the inside of an inlet port 6, respectively is attached in each branch pipe 9. A surge tank 10 is connected with an air cleaner 13 through an air intake duct 12 and an air flow meter 21, and the throttle valve 14 is arranged in the air intake duct 12.

[0023] On the other hand, an exhaust port 8 is connected to the casing 18 which built in the occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst (NOx absorber) 17 through the exhaust manifold 15 and the exhaust pipe 16, and casing 18 is connected to the muffler which is not illustrated through an exhaust pipe 19. In addition, in the following explanation, the occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst 17 is abbreviated to the NOx catalyst 17.

[0024] The electronic control unit (ECU) 30 for engine control consists of a digital computer, and ROM (read-only memory)32, RAM (random access memory)33, CPU (central processor unit)34, the input port

35, and the output port 36 which were mutually connected by the bi-directional bus 31 are provided. An air flow meter 21 generates the output voltage proportional to an inhalation air content, and this output voltage is inputted into input port 35 through A-D converter 38.

[0025] The close gas SOx sensor (SOx concentration detection means of the NOx absorber upstream) 23 which generates the output voltage proportional to the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas which flows into the NOx catalyst 17 in the exhaust pipe 16 of the upstream of casing 18 is formed, and the appearance gas SOx sensor (SOx concentration detection means of a NOx absorber lower stream of a river) 24 which generates the output voltage proportional to the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas which flows out of the NOx catalyst 17 is formed in the exhaust pipe 19 of the lower stream of a river of casing 18. The output voltage of these SOx sensors 23 and 24 is inputted into input port 35 through corresponding A-D converter 38, respectively.

[0026] In the exhaust pipe 19 of the lower stream of a river of casing 18, the temperature sensor 25 which generates the output voltage proportional to the temperature of exhaust gas is attached, and it is inputted into input port 35 through A-D converter 38 to which the output voltage of this temperature sensor 25 corresponds. Moreover, the rotational frequency sensor 26 which generates the output pulse showing an engine rotational frequency is connected to input port 35. The output port 36 is connected to the ignition plug 4 and the fuel injection valve 11 through the corresponding actuation circuit 39, respectively.

[0027] In this gasoline engine, fuel injection duration TAU is computed, for example based on a degree type.

TAU=TP-K -- here, TP shows basic fuel injection duration and K shows the correction factor. The basic fuel injection duration TP shows fuel injection duration required to make into theoretical air fuel ratio the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in an engine cylinder. This basic fuel injection duration TP is beforehand found by experiment, and is beforehand memorized in ROM32 in the form of a map as shown in drawing 2 as a function of engine load Q/N (inhalation air content Q / engine rotational frequency N) and the engine rotational frequency N. A correction factor K is a multiplier for controlling the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in an engine cylinder, and if it is K= 1.0, the gaseous mixture supplied in an engine cylinder will serve as theoretical air fuel ratio. On the other hand, if the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in an engine cylinder will become larger than theoretical air fuel ratio if set to K< 1.0, namely, it becomes Lean and it is set to K> 1.0, the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in an engine cylinder will become smaller than theoretical air fuel ratio, namely, will become rich.

[0028] and in the gasoline engine of the gestalt of this operation Lean Air Fuel Ratio Control is performed the value of a correction factor K being used as a value smaller than 1.0 in a load operating range in engine low. At the time of the warm-up at the time of an engine heavy load operating range and engine start up, at the time of acceleration, SUTOIKI control is performed the value of a correction factor K being used as 1.0, and by the time of high-speed fixed-speed operation, by the engine full load operating range, the value of a correction factor K is set up so that it may consider as a bigger value than 1.0 and rich Air Fuel Ratio Control may be performed.

[0029] in an internal combustion engine, the value of a correction factor K usually makes [in / the frequency by which load operation in low is carried out is the highest, therefore / most in an operating period] it smaller than 1.0 -- having -- Lean -- gaseous mixture is made to burn

[0030] Drawing 3 shows roughly the concentration of the typical component in the exhaust gas discharged from a combustion chamber 3. unburnt [in the exhaust gas discharged from a combustion chamber 3 as shown in this drawing] -- the concentration of HC and CO increases, so that the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in a combustion chamber 3 becomes rich, and the concentration of the oxygen O₂ in the exhaust gas discharged from a combustion chamber 3 increases, so that the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in a combustion chamber 3 becomes Lean.

[0031] The NOx catalyst (occlusion reduction type NOx catalyst) 17 held in casing 18 makes an alumina support, and it comes to support at least one chosen from Potassium K, Sodium Na, Lithium Li, alkali metal like Caesium Cs, Barium Ba, an alkaline earth like Calcium calcium, Lanthanum La, and rare earth like Yttrium Y, and noble metals like Platinum Pt on this support.

[0032] The absorption/emission action of NOx which emits NOx absorbed when the NOx catalyst 17 absorbed NOx when the air-fuel ratio (it may be hereafter called an exhaust air air-fuel ratio) of the flowing exhaust gas was Lean when this NOx catalyst 17 had been arranged to an engine's flueway, and the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas fell is performed. Here, an exhaust air air-fuel ratio means the ratio of the air supplied in the upstream flueway from the engine inhalation-of-air path and the NOx catalyst 17, and a fuel (hydrocarbon).

[0033] in addition, when a fuel (hydrocarbon) or air is not supplied in an upstream flueway from the NOx catalyst 17 An exhaust air air-fuel ratio is [therefore] in agreement with the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in a combustion chamber 3. In this case the gaseous mixture which the NOx catalyst 17 absorbs NOx when the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture supplied in a combustion chamber 3 is Lean, and is supplied in a combustion chamber 3 -- NOx absorbed when the inner oxygen density fell will be emitted.

[0034] It is thought that the absorption/emission action of NOx by the NOx catalyst 17 is performed by the mechanism as shown in drawing 4. Although this mechanism is hereafter explained taking the case of the case where Platinum Pt and Barium Ba are made to support, on support, it becomes the same mechanism even if it uses other noble metals, alkali metal, an alkaline earth, and rare earth.

[0035] First, as the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas will increase sharply if inflow exhaust gas becomes Lean considerably, and shown in drawing 4 (A), it is oxygen O₂. It adheres to the front face of Platinum Pt in the form of O₂₋ or O₂₋. On the other hand, NO contained in inflow exhaust gas reacts with O₂₋ or O₂₋ on the front face of Platinum Pt, and is NO₂. It becomes (2 NO+O₂ ->2NO₂).

[0036] Subsequently, being absorbed in the NOx catalyst 17 and combining with the barium oxide BaO oxidizing on Platinum Pt, a part of generated NO₂ is diffused in the NOx catalyst 17 in the form of nitrate ion NO₃₋, as shown in drawing 4 (A). Thus, NOx is absorbed in the NOx catalyst 17.

[0037] As long as the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas is high, NO₂ is generated on the front face of Platinum Pt, and it is NOx of the NOx catalyst 17. Unless absorptance is saturated, NO₂ is absorbed in the NOx catalyst 17, and nitrate ion NO₃₋ is generated.

[0038] On the other hand, if the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas falls and the amount of generation of NO₂ falls, a reaction will go to hard flow (NO₃₋->NO₂), and nitrate ion NO₃₋ within the NOx catalyst 17 will be emitted from the NOx catalyst 17 in the form of NO₂ or NO. That is, lowering of the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas will emit NOx from the NOx catalyst 17. If the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas will fall if the degree of Lean of inflow exhaust gas becomes low, therefore the degree of Lean of inflow exhaust gas is made low as shown in drawing 3, NOx will be emitted from the NOx catalyst 17.

[0039] on the other hand, when the gaseous mixture supplied in a combustion chamber 3 becomes SUTOIKI or a rich air-fuel ratio at this time, it is shown in drawing 3 -- as -- unburnt [from an engine / a lot of] -- HC and CO discharge -- having -- unburnt [these] -- HC and CO react with oxygen O₂₋ on Platinum Pt, or O₂₋, and are made to oxidize

[0040] moreover, if an exhaust air air-fuel ratio turns into theoretical air fuel ratio or a rich air-fuel ratio, in order for the oxygen density in inflow exhaust gas to fall to the degree of pole, NO₂ or NO is emitted from the NOx catalyst 17, and this NO₂ or NO is shown in drawing 4 (B) -- as -- unburnt -- it reacts with HC and CO, and it is made to return and is set to N₂.

[0041] That is, HC in inflow exhaust gas and CO react immediately with oxygen O₂₋ on Platinum Pt, or O₂₋ first, and are made to oxidize, and if HC and CO still remain even if oxygen O₂₋ or O₂₋ on Platinum Pt is subsequently consumed, NOx emitted from the NOx catalyst 17 and NOx in inflow exhaust gas will be made to return them to N₂ by this HC and CO.

[0042] Thus, when NO₂ or NO stops existing on the front face of Platinum Pt, NO₂ or NO is emitted to a degree from a degree from the NOx catalyst 17, and it is made to return to N₂ further. Therefore, when an exhaust air air-fuel ratio is made into theoretical air fuel ratio or Rich, NOx will be emitted to the inside of a short time from the NOx catalyst 17.

[0043] Thus, if an exhaust air air-fuel ratio becomes Lean, NOx will be absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17, and if an exhaust air air-fuel ratio is made into theoretical air fuel ratio or Rich, NOx will be emitted to the inside of a short time from the NOx catalyst 17, and will be returned to N₂. Therefore, blowdown of NOx to the inside of atmospheric air can be prevented.

[0044] By the way, since it is supposed at the time of full load running that the gaseous mixture supplied in a combustion chamber 3 is rich, and gaseous mixture is made into theoretical air fuel ratio at the time of heavy load operation and gaseous mixture is made into Lean at the time of load operation in low as mentioned above with the gestalt of this operation NOx in exhaust gas will be absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 at the time of load operation in low, and NOx will be emitted and returned from the NOx catalyst 17 at the time of full load running and heavy load operation etc. Frequency, such as full load running or heavy load operation, is low, and if there is much frequency of load operation in low and the operation time excels, bleedoff and reduction of NOx stop meeting the deadline, the absorptance of NOx of the NOx catalyst 17 will be saturated, and it will become impossible however, to absorb NOx.

[0045] then -- the gestalt of this operation -- Lean -- the time of performing inside low load driving, when

combustion of gaseous mixture is performed -- comparatively -- alike -- a short period -- a spike ---like (short time) -- SUTOIKI -- or rich -- the air-fuel ratio of gaseous mixture is controlled so that combustion of gaseous mixture is performed, and bleedoff and reduction of NOx are performed in short period. Thus, for the absorption/emission of NOx, it has called it the Lean Ricci Spike control to control "Lean", and spike- "theoretical air fuel ratio or a rich air-fuel ratio (rich spike)" to be repeated by turns the period with an exhaust air air-fuel ratio (the gestalt of this operation air-fuel ratio of gaseous mixture) short in comparison. In addition, in this application, the Lean Ricci Spike control shall be included in Lean Air Fuel Ratio Control.

[0046] On the other hand, if sulfur (S) is contained in the fuel and the sulfur in a fuel burns, sulfur oxides (SOx), such as SO₂ and SO₃, will be generated, and these SOx in exhaust gas will also absorb the NOx catalyst 17. It is thought that the SOx absorption mechanism of the NOx catalyst 17 is the same as a NOx absorption mechanism. Namely, if it explains taking the case of the case where Platinum Pt and Barium Ba are made to *****, on support like the time of explaining the absorption mechanism of NOx, as mentioned above When an exhaust air air-fuel ratio is Lean, oxygen O₂ has adhered to the front face of the platinum Pt of the NOx catalyst 17 in the form of O₂₋ or O₂₋, and SOx in inflow exhaust gas (for example, SO₂) oxidizes on the front face of Platinum Pt, and serves as SO₃.

[0047] Then, generated SO₃ is absorbed in the NOx catalyst 17, combines with the barium oxide BaO, oxidizing further on the front face of Platinum Pt, is diffused in the NOx catalyst 17 in the form of sulfate ion SO₄₂₋, and forms a sulfate BaSO₄. Since it is easy to make a crystal big and rough and it tends [comparatively] to be stabilized, once it is generated, the decomposition and desorption of this BaSO₄ will be hard to be done. And if the amount of generation of BaSO₄ in the NOx catalyst 17 increases, the amount of BaO which can participate in absorption of the NOx catalyst 17 will decrease, and the absorptance of NOx will decline. It is this, i.e., SOx poisoning. Therefore, in order to maintain the NOx absorptance of the NOx catalyst 17 highly, it is necessary to perform SOx desorption processing from which SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 to proper timing is desorbed.

[0048] In order to desorb SOx from the NOx catalyst 17, it turns out that it is necessary to make the air-fuel ratio of the flowing exhaust gas into theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio and, and it is easy to *****, so that the catalyst floor temperature of the NOx catalyst 17 is high.

[0049] And with the gestalt of this operation, also when making the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas into theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio for SOx desorption processing, it carries out by controlling the air-fuel ratio of the gaseous mixture which controls the fuel quantity injected from a fuel injection valve 11 by ECU30, and is supplied to a combustion chamber 3 to theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio. Therefore, ECU30 and a fuel injection valve 11 constitute an exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means.

[0050] Drawing 5 shows an example of aging of the SOx concentration of the upstream of ** exhaust air air-fuel ratio the time of performing the Lean Ricci Spike control for the absorption/emission and reduction processing of NOx, and when performing SUTOIKI or Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control for SOx desorption processing, the SOx accumulated dose of the **NOx catalyst 17, and the **NOx catalyst 17, and a lower stream of a river. In addition, in this drawing, the exhaust air air-fuel ratio at the time of NOx absorption/emission and reduction processing omits Ricci Spike, and is indicating by Lean, and the Ricci display in the exhaust air air-fuel ratio at the time of SOx desorption processing is a concept containing theoretical air fuel ratio. Hereafter, with reference to drawing 5, aging of a SOx accumulated dose and SOx concentration is explained.

[0051] (1) If the exhaust gas of the Lean air-fuel ratio flows for the NOx catalyst 17 when there are few SOx accumulated doses of t1 - the t2NOx catalyst 17, since SOx in exhaust gas will be absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17, the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 increases with time. Moreover, while SOx in exhaust gas is absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17, the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas (henceforth catalyst appearance gas) of the lower stream of a river of the NOx catalyst 17 is lower than the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas (henceforth catalyst close gas) of the upstream of the NOx catalyst 17.

[0052] (2) If the SOx accumulated dose of t2 - the t3NOx catalyst 17 increases and SOx absorption capacity decreases, the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas will approach the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas gradually. This means that SOx which carries out through pass, without being absorbed with the NOx catalyst 17 increases gradually, consequently its buildup degree of the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 becomes blunt.

[0053] (3) In t3-t4t3, if an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control (air-fuel ratio regularity) are started in order to desorb SOx from the NOx catalyst 17, since SOx desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17

will flow into the lower stream of a river of the NOx catalyst 17, the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas becomes higher than the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas, and the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 decreases with time. The SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas greets a peak by predetermined time, after starting an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control, and it decreases gradually after that.

[0054] (4) End an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control in t4-t5, however t4, and while it is for a while even after shifting to the Lean Ricci Spike control, desorption of SOx continues from the NOx catalyst 17. Thus, although after [the reason's / SOx desorption continues] an elevated temperature and the Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control termination is not clear, it is clear from many experimental results that repeatability is in this phenomenon. And in t5, if SOx stops desorbing from the NOx catalyst 17, the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas and the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas will become equivalent, and the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 will become min at this time.

[0055] (5) If it passes over t5-t6t5, again, SOx comes to be absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17, the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas becomes small gradually rather than the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas, and the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas balances in t6.
 [0056] Namely, C point the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas and whose SOx concentration of catalyst close gas correspond While [from a SOx desorption condition to a SOx absorbing state] it changes, it is the point and the NOx catalyst 17 is adsorbing SOx in exhaust gas When the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas becomes smaller than the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas and SOx is desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17, the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas becomes larger than the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas.

[0057] And it sets at the period (t0-t3) when the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas is smaller than the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas. If the SOx concentration difference is multiplied by the amount of exhaust gas, the amount of SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 will be computed, and it sets at the period (t3-t5) when the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas is larger than the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas. When the SOx concentration difference is multiplied by the amount of exhaust gas, the amount of SOx desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 will be computed.

[0058] So, with the gestalt of this 1st operation, the amount of SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 from t0 was computed, the SOx accumulated dose was computed by integrating this, and when the computed SOx accumulated dose reached a predetermined upper limit, an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control were started. And after starting an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control, when the amount of SOx desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 was computed, the SOx accumulated dose in the middle of SOx desorption was computed by carrying out sequential subtraction of this from said SOx accumulated dose and a SOx accumulated dose became below a predetermined lower limit, an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control were ended.

[0059] If it does in this way, the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 can be grasped to accuracy, SOx desorption can be started at the optimal stage, and supply of the exhaust gas of the Ricci air-fuel ratio can be ended at the optimal stage. Consequently, while being able to continue at a long period of time and being able to maintain the NOx decontamination capacity of the NOx catalyst 17 highly, the fuel consumption aggravation accompanying SOx desorption can be reduced.

[0060] Next, with reference to drawing 6, the SOx desorption control running routine in the gestalt of the 1st operation is explained. The flow chart which consists of each step which constitutes this control routine is memorized by ROM32 of ECU30, and this control routine is performed by CPU34 for every fixed time amount.

[0061] <Step 101> First, in step 101, ECU30 reads the SOx concentration (it may be hereafter called close gas SOx concentration for short) of the catalyst close gas detected by the close gas SOx sensor 23, and reads the SOx concentration (it may be hereafter called appearance gas SOx concentration for short) of the catalyst appearance gas detected by the appearance gas SOx sensor 24.

[0062] It progresses to step 102, close gas SOx concentration comes out, and <step 102>, next ECU30 judge whether it is larger than gas SOx concentration. It means that the NOx catalyst 17 is SOx absorbing the affirmation judging in step 102, and means that the NOx catalyst 17 is being SOx desorbed from a negative judging.

[0063] When an affirmation judging is carried out at <step 103> step 102, ECU30 progresses to step 103 and adds a SOx accumulated dose. If it explains in full detail, will come out of the close gas SOx concentration read at step 101, will subtract gas SOx concentration, will search for a SOx concentration difference, on the other hand, will read the inhalation air content at present detected with the air flow meter

21, and this will be made into the amount of exhaust gas. The amount of SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 after performing this routine this time before performing next time is computed, this amount of absorption SOx is added in a SOx counter, and a SOx accumulated dose at present is calculated.

[0064] <Step 104>, next ECU30 progress to step 104, and judge whether the SOx accumulated dose is over the upper limit set up beforehand. Since it still is not the stage when SOx desorption processing should be performed when a negative judging is carried out at step 104, it progresses to a return.

[0065] When an affirmation judging is carried out at <step 105> step 104, ECU30 progresses to step 105, and since it is desorbed from SOx, it starts Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control which controls the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas to theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio from the NOx catalyst 17. In addition, while this Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control is performed, temperature-up control to the NOx catalyst 17 is performed, and the catalyst floor temperature of the NOx catalyst 17 is controlled by the proper means by the optimal temperature for SOx desorption.

[0066] Since SOx is desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 and appearance gas SOx concentration becomes higher than close gas SOx concentration by activation of <step 106> Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control, when this routine is performed next time, a negative judging is carried out in step 102, and ECU30 progresses to step 106 and subtracts a SOx accumulated dose.

[0067] If it explains in full detail, the inhalation air content of this time which came out, subtracted close gas SOx concentration from gas SOx concentration, searched for the SOx concentration difference, and was detected with the air flow meter 21 on the other hand read at step 101 is read, by making this into the amount of exhaust gas, the amount of SOx desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 after performing this routine this time before performing next time will be computed, the amount of desorption SOx will be subtracted in a SOx counter, and a SOx accumulated dose at present will be calculated.

[0068] <Step 107>, next ECU30 progress to step 107, and judge whether it is below the lower limit that the SOx accumulated dose set up beforehand. When a negative judging is carried out at step 107, since it is in the condition that SOx is not fully desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 yet, it progresses to a return, and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control are continued.

[0069] Since SOx was fully desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 when an affirmation judging was carried out at <step 108> step 107, ECU30 progresses to step 108 and ends Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control.

[0070] In the gestalt of this 1st operation, the part which performs step 103 among a series of signal processing by ECU30 can be called SOx accumulated dose calculation means to compute the amount of SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst (NOx absorber) based on the SOx concentration difference of the upstream and the lower stream of a river of a NOx catalyst (NOx absorber).

[0071] [Gestalt of the 2nd operation] with the gestalt of the 1st operation of the above-mentioned Although the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 was computed and the initiation stage and termination stage of an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control for SOx desorption processing were judged based on the computed SOx accumulated dose from the SOx concentration difference of the upstream and the lower stream of a river of the NOx catalyst 17 With the gestalt of the 2nd operation, the initiation stage and termination stage of an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control were judged based on the compound value of the SOx concentration of the upstream and the lower stream of a river of the NOx catalyst 17, without computing a SOx accumulated dose.

[0072] If the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 increases and a saturation state is approached as mentioned above, the SOx concentration of catalyst appearance gas will approach the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas (setting to drawing 5 between t2-t3). Therefore, SOx are recording extent of the NOx catalyst 17 can be grasped by to what extent appearance gas SOx concentration approached close gas SOx concentration. So, with the gestalt of this 2nd operation, when the ratio of appearance gas SOx concentration and close gas SOx concentration became a predetermined ratio (for example, 1:2) (it sets to drawing 5 and is the A section), an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control were started.

[0073] Moreover, when SOx is desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17, even if it changes an exhaust air air-fuel ratio from Ricci to Lean before desorption of SOx is completed thoroughly, after changing to Lean, the NOx catalyst 17 to SOx is desorbed from the period for a while (setting to drawing 5 between t4-t5). Therefore, while performing Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control, before appearance gas SOx concentration is in agreement with close gas SOx concentration, the amount of the reducing agent used can be reduced by being able to make the time of appearance gas SOx concentration approaching close gas SOx concentration to a predetermined value into the termination stage of an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control, and doing so. So, with the gestalt of this 2nd operation, when the ratio of appearance gas SOx concentration

and close gas SOx concentration became a predetermined ratio (for example, 2:1) (it sets to drawing 5 and is the B section), an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control were ended.

[0074] If it does in this way, SOx are recording extent of the NOx catalyst 17 can be grasped with a sufficient precision, and SOx desorption can be started at the optimal stage. Moreover, supply of the exhaust gas of the Ricci air-fuel ratio can be ended at the optimal stage. Consequently, while being able to continue at a long period of time and being able to maintain the NOx decontamination capacity of the NOx catalyst 17 highly, the fuel consumption aggravation accompanying SOx desorption can be reduced.

[0075] Next, with reference to drawing 7, the SOx desorption control running routine in the gestalt of the 2nd operation is explained. The flow chart which consists of each step which constitutes this control routine is memorized by ROM32 of ECU30, and this control routine is performed by CPU34 for every fixed time amount.

[0076] <Step 201> First, in step 201, ECU30 reads the SOx concentration of the catalyst close gas detected by the close gas SOx sensor 23, and reads the SOx concentration of the catalyst appearance gas detected by the appearance gas SOx sensor 24.

[0077] It progresses to step 202, close gas SOx concentration comes out, and <step 202>, next ECU30 judge whether it is larger than gas SOx concentration. It means that the NOx catalyst 17 is SOx absorbing the affirmation judging in step 202, and means that the NOx catalyst 17 is being SOx desorbed from a negative judging.

[0078] When an affirmation judging is carried out at <step 203> step 202, ECU30 progresses to step 203 and appearance gas SOx concentration judges whether it is under [lifting] *****. It comes out as are shown in drawing 5, and appearance gas SOx concentration falls immediately after the NOx catalyst 17 changes from a SOx desorption condition to a SOx absorbing state (t0-t1) and the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 approaches saturation, and gas SOx concentration rises (t2-t3). At step 203, it judges whether the NOx catalyst 17 is in which this condition. Since it still is not the initiation stage of SOx desorption processing when a negative judging is carried out in step 203, ECU30 progresses to a return.

[0079] When an affirmation judging is carried out in <step 204> step 203, ECU30 progresses to step 204 and computes the ratio of concentration alpha of appearance gas SOx concentration and close gas SOx concentration.

$\text{alpha} = (\text{appearance gas SOx concentration}) / (\text{close gas SOx concentration})$

[0080] It judges whether <step 205>, next ECU30 have the ratio of concentration alpha larger than a upper limit (for example, 0.5) which progressed to step 205 and was computed at step 204. Since it still is not the stage when SOx desorption processing should be performed when a negative judging is carried out at step 205, ECU30 progresses to a return.

[0081] When an affirmation judging is carried out at <step 206> step 205, ECU30 progresses to step 206, and since it is desorbed from SOx, it starts Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control which controls the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas to theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio from the NOx catalyst 17. In addition, while this Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control is performed, temperature-up control to the NOx catalyst 17 is performed, and the catalyst floor temperature of the NOx catalyst 17 is controlled by the proper means by the optimal temperature for SOx desorption.

[0082] Since SOx is desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17 and appearance gas SOx concentration becomes higher than close gas SOx concentration by activation of <step 207> Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control, when this routine is performed next time, a negative judging is carried out in step 202, and ECU30 progresses to step 207.

[0083] In step 207, as for ECU30, appearance gas SOx concentration judges whether it is under [downward] *****. As shown in drawing 5, appearance gas SOx concentration rises for a while from the Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control initiation, peak value is greeted soon, and appearance gas SOx concentration descends after that (t3-t4). At step 207, it judges whether the NOx catalyst 17 is in which this condition.

[0084] Since Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control should not be ended yet when a negative judging is carried out in step 207, ECU30 progresses to a return and continues Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control.

[0085] When an affirmation judging is carried out in <step 208> step 207, ECU30 progresses to step 208 and computes the ratio of concentration alpha of appearance gas SOx concentration and close gas SOx concentration.

$\text{alpha} = (\text{appearance gas SOx concentration}) / (\text{close gas SOx concentration})$

[0086] It judges whether <step 209>, next ECU30 have the ratio of concentration alpha smaller than a lower limit (for example, 2) which progressed to step 209 and was computed at step 208. When a negative judging

is carried out at step 209, since Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control should not be ended, ECU30 progresses to a return and still continues Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control.

[0087] When an affirmation judging is carried out at <step 210> step 209, ECU30 progresses to step 210 and ends Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control for SOx desorption processing, and temperature-up control.

[0088] [Gestalt of the 3rd operation] With the gestalt of the 2nd operation of the above-mentioned, although initiation ***** of an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control is judged based on the ratio of concentration of the SOx concentration of the upstream and the lower stream of a river of the NOx catalyst 17, when the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas which flows into the NOx catalyst 17 is low, even if said SOx ratio of concentration fulfills predetermined conditions, as a SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17, it is sometimes few. Thus, even if it performs an elevated temperature and Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control in the condition with few SOx accumulated doses of the NOx catalyst 17, SOx will not be efficiently desorbed from the NOx catalyst 17, but a reducing agent will be consumed vainly.

[0089] So, with the gestalt of this 3rd operation, when the SOx accumulated dose of the NOx catalyst 17 had not reached the specified quantity, activation of SOx desorption processing was forbidden, the SOx accumulated dose was more than the specified quantity, and when the SOx ratio of concentration of the upstream and the lower stream of a river of the NOx catalyst 17 fulfilled predetermined conditions, it restricted, and we decided to perform SOx desorption processing.

[0090] Next, with reference to drawing 8, the SOx desorption control running routine in the gestalt of the 3rd operation is explained. The flow chart which consists of each step which constitutes this control routine is memorized by ROM32 of ECU30, and this control routine is performed by CPU34 for every fixed time amount.

[0091] Since <steps 301-302> step 301,302 is the same as step 201,202 in the gestalt of the 2nd operation respectively, explanation is omitted.

[0092] When an affirmation judging is carried out at step 302, ECU30 progresses to step 303 and adds a SOx accumulated dose. If it explains in full detail, will come out of the close gas SOx concentration read at step 101, will subtract gas SOx concentration, will search for a SOx concentration difference, on the other hand, will read the inhalation air content at present detected with the air flow meter 21, and this will be made into the amount of exhaust gas. The amount of SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 after performing this routine this time before performing next time is computed, this amount of absorption SOx is added in a SOx counter, and a SOx accumulated dose at present is calculated.

[0093] <Step 304>, next ECU30 progress to step 304, and judge whether the SOx accumulated dose is over the SOx desorption activation lower limit set up beforehand. Since it still is not the stage when SOx desorption processing should be performed when a negative judging is carried out at step 304, it progresses to a return.

[0094] When an affirmation judging is carried out at step 305 - <step 311> step 304, ECU30 progresses to step 305. From step 204 in the gestalt of the 2nd operation, since step 305 to the step 311 is the same as step 210, it omits explanation.

[0095] In addition, when a SOx accumulated dose is more than a SOx desorption activation lower limit in step 304, there is no processing corresponding to step 203 of the control routine in the gestalt of the 2nd operation in the control routine of the gestalt of the 3rd operation because it should already have passed over the period (it sets to drawing 5 and is t0-t1) to which appearance gas SOx concentration descends.

[0096] After the <step> 312 ECU ends Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control in step 311, it progresses to step 312, resets a SOx counter, and ends this routine. [30]

[0097] In the gestalt of this 3rd operation, the part which performs step 303 among a series of signal processing by ECU30 can be called SOx accumulated dose calculation means to compute the amount of SOx absorbed by the NOx catalyst (NOx absorber) based on the SOx concentration difference of the upstream and the lower stream of a river of a NOx catalyst (NOx absorber).

[0098] gestalt] of operation of others [[] -- the above-mentioned 2nd and the gestalt of the 3rd operation -- the judgment of the termination stage of Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control and temperature-up control -- the ratio of appearance gas SOx concentration and close gas SOx concentration -- although carried out by whether alpha fulfills predetermined conditions (alpha< 2), the elapsed time after replacing with this and starting Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control may judge said termination stage by whether predetermined time amount was reached.

[0099] Moreover, when judging the termination stage of Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control by elapsed time as mentioned above, it is also possible to compute the SOx accumulated dose of a before [SOx desorption processing initiation], to amend SOx desorption processing conditions (Air Fuel Ratio Control conditions of

an exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means), such as the Ricci degree and the Ricci air-fuel ratio duration time, according to the magnitude of the SOx accumulated dose, and to perform Ricci Air Fuel Ratio Control for SOx desorption processing.

[0100] Although the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas which forms the close gas SOx sensor 23 in the upstream of the NOx catalyst 17, and flows into the NOx catalyst 17 by this close gas SOx sensor 23 is detected with the gestalt of each above-mentioned operation, since it is dependent on fuel quantity and the amount of exhaust gas, the SOx concentration of the exhaust gas which flows into the NOx catalyst 17 can be presumed from engine operation conditions (fuel oil consumption, an air-fuel ratio, an inhalation air content, engine speed, etc.). Therefore, instead of forming the close gas SOx sensor 23, the SOx concentration of catalyst close gas is computed by ECU30, and you may make it presume from an engine operation condition.

[0101] Although the example applied to the gasoline engine explained this invention with the gestalt of each operation mentioned above, of course, this invention is applicable to a diesel power plant. Since it is carried out in the Lean region farther [combustion in a combustion chamber] than SUTOIKI in the case of a diesel power plant, the air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas which flows into the NOx catalyst 17 in the usual engine operational status is very Lean, and although absorption of NOx and SOx is performed, bleedoff of NOx and SOx is hardly performed.

[0102] Moreover, an exhaust air air-fuel ratio is made into SUTOIKI or Ricci by making into SUTOIKI or Ricci gaseous mixture supplied to a combustion chamber 3 as mentioned above in the case of the gasoline engine. Although NOx and SOx which the oxygen density in exhaust gas is reduced and are absorbed by the NOx catalyst 17 can be made to emit In the case of a diesel power plant, if gaseous mixture supplied to a combustion chamber is made into SUTOIKI or Ricci, in the case of combustion, there can be the problem of soot being generated and cannot adopt.

[0103] Therefore, in order to make an exhaust air air-fuel ratio into SUTOIKI or Ricci, and to obtain an engine output, it is necessary when applying this invention to a diesel power plant, to supply a reducing agent (for example, gas oil which is a fuel) into exhaust gas apart from burning a fuel. Also by subinjecting a fuel in a cylinder in an intake stroke, an expansion stroke, or an exhaust stroke, supply of the reducing agent to exhaust gas is possible, or possible also by supplying a reducing agent in the flueway of the upstream of the NOx catalyst 17.

[0104] In addition, even if it is a diesel power plant, when it has exhaust-gas-recirculation equipment (the so-called EGR equipment), it is possible by introducing exhaust-gas-recirculation gas into a combustion chamber so much to make the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas into theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio.

[0105]

[Effect of the Invention] The NOx absorber which was formed in the flueway of the internal combustion engine in which (b) lean combustion is possible according to the exhaust emission control device of the internal combustion engine concerning this invention, (b) The SOx concentration detection means formed in the flueway of the lower stream of a river of said NOx absorber, An exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means to control the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas to theoretical air fuel ratio or the Ricci air-fuel ratio when desorbed from SOx absorbed by said NOx absorber, (Ha) By having made said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means operate based on the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected by the preparation and said SOx concentration detection means The progress condition of SOx poisoning of a NOx absorber can be grasped exactly, and optimal SOx desorption processing can be performed to a NOx absorber.

[0106] When the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber lower stream of a river detected with the SOx concentration detection means is descending, the SOx concentration of a NOx absorber lower stream of a river approaches the SOx concentration of the NOx absorber upstream to a predetermined value and Air Fuel Ratio Control by said exhaust air Air Fuel Ratio Control means is ended, the fuel consumption aggravation which can reduce the amount of the reducing agent used for SOx desorption, consequently originates in SOx desorption processing can be reduced.

[Translation done.]

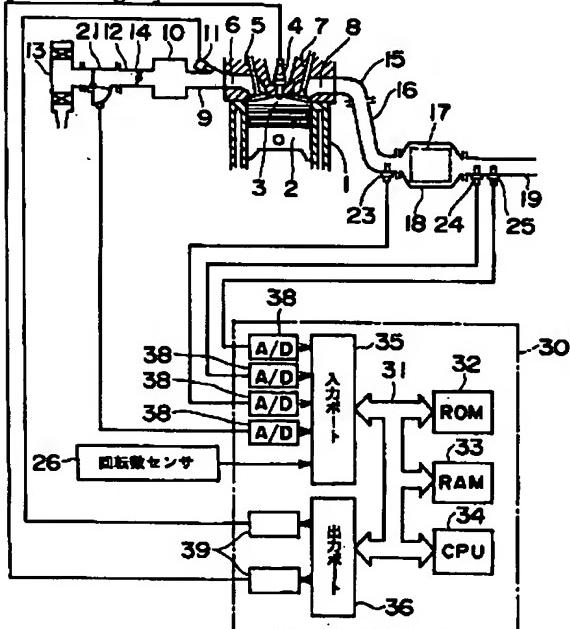
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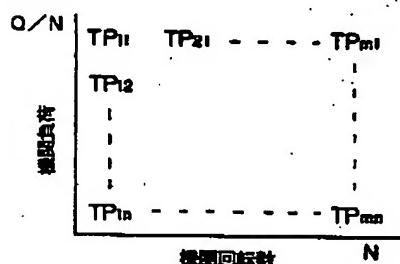
1. This document has been translated by computer. So the translation may not reflect the original precisely.
- 2.**** shows the word which can not be translated.
3. In the drawings, any words are not translated.

DRAWINGS

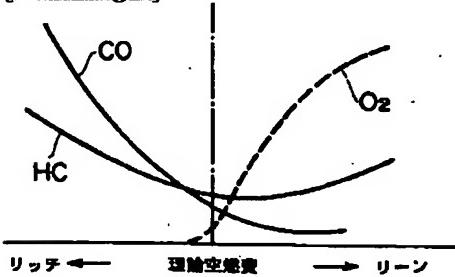
[Drawing 1]



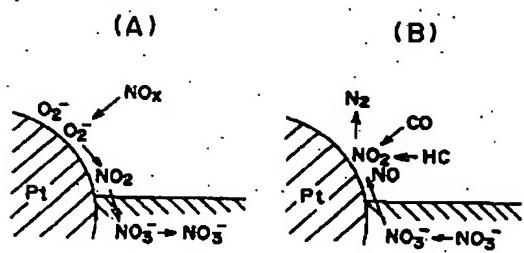
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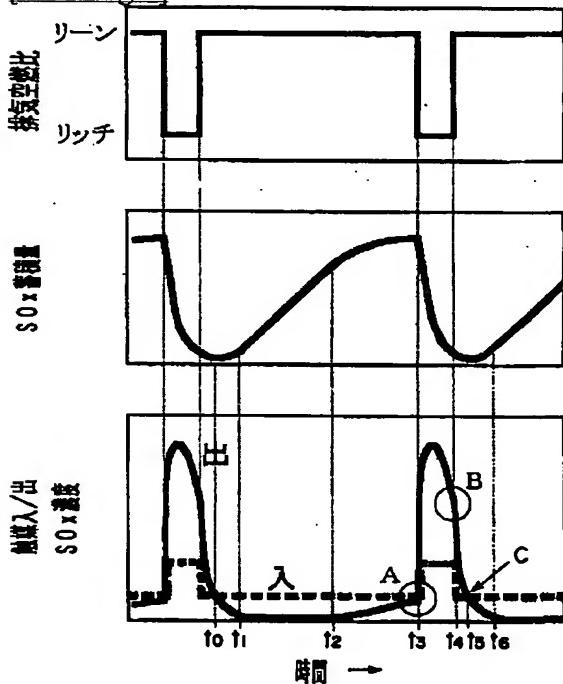
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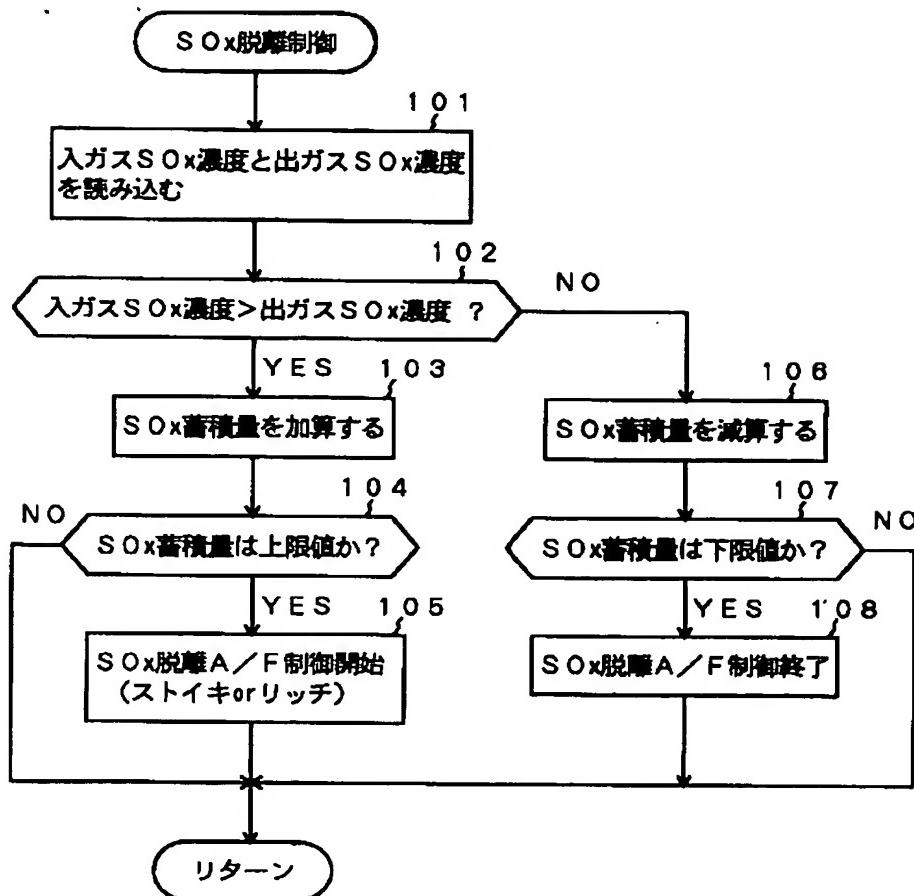
[Drawing 4]



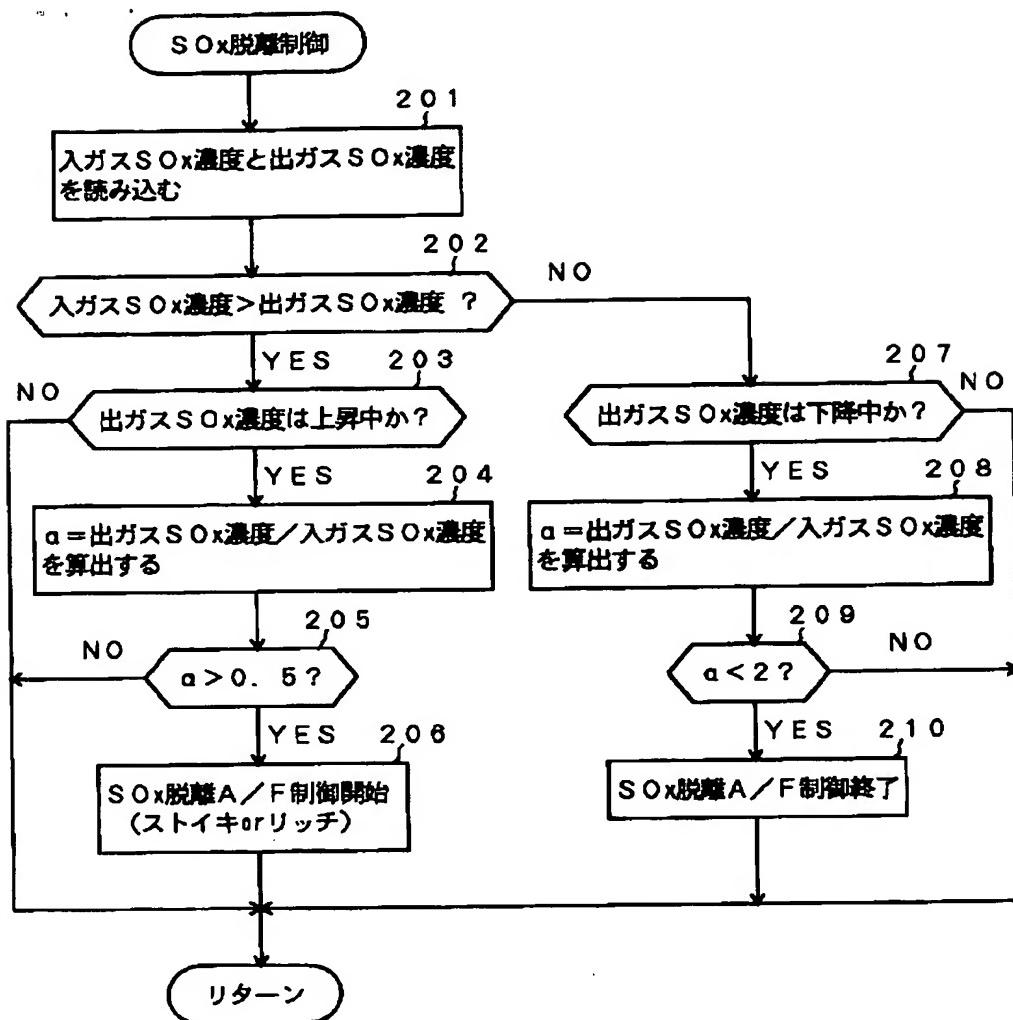
[Drawing 5]



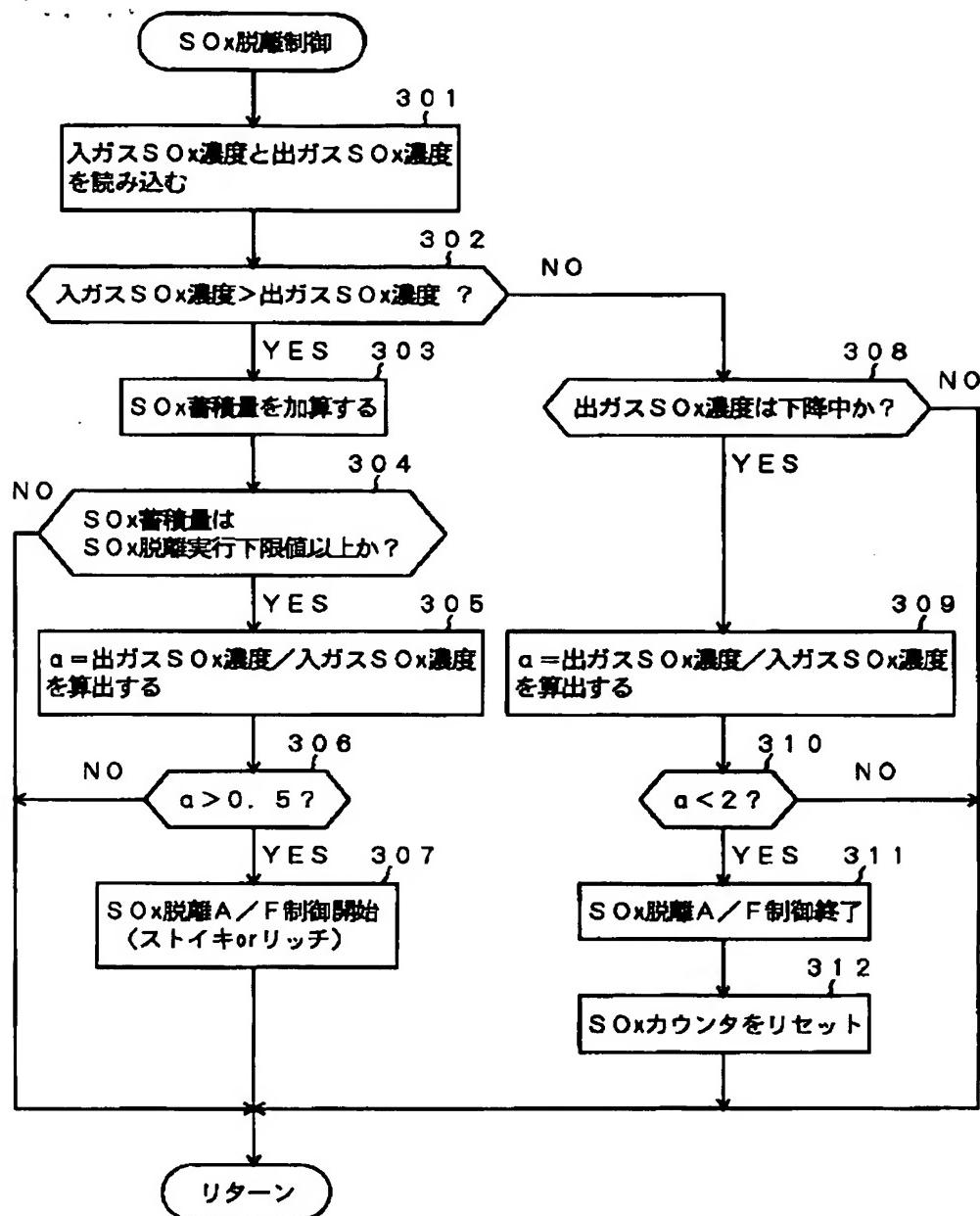
[Drawing 6]



[Drawing 7]



[Drawing 8]



[Translation done.]

(19)



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(72) Inventor: KATO KENJI

(54) EXHAUST EMISSION CONTROL DEVICE FOR INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE

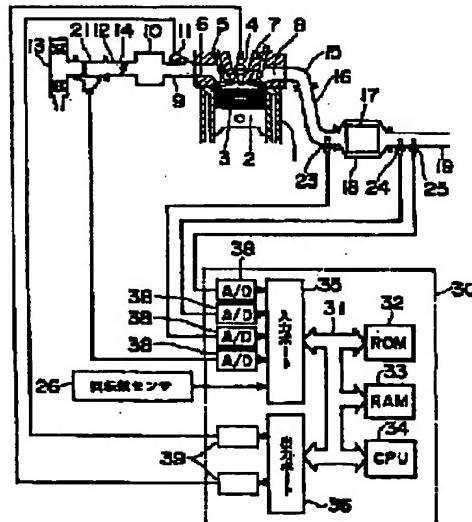
lower than a given value during SO_x desorption treatment, SO_x desorption treatment is completed.

(57) Abstract:

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PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To perform control of an executing timing of SO_x desorption treatment of an occlusion reduction type NO_x catalyst to an optimum value.

SOLUTION: This control device is provided in the exhaust pipe 16 of a lean combustible internal combustion engine with an occlusion reduction type NO_x catalyst 17. In this case, an incoming gas SO_x sensor 23 is provided upper stream from the NO_x catalyst 17 and an outgoing gas SO_x sensor 24 is provided downstream therefrom. Based on incoming gas SO_x concentration detected by the incoming gas SO_x sensor 23 and outgoing gas SO_x concentration detected by the outgoing gas SO_x sensor 24, an SO_x storage amount of the NO_x catalyst 17 is calculated, and when an SO_x storage amount exceeds a given value, SO_x desorption treatment is executed and when an SO_x storage amount is reduced to a value



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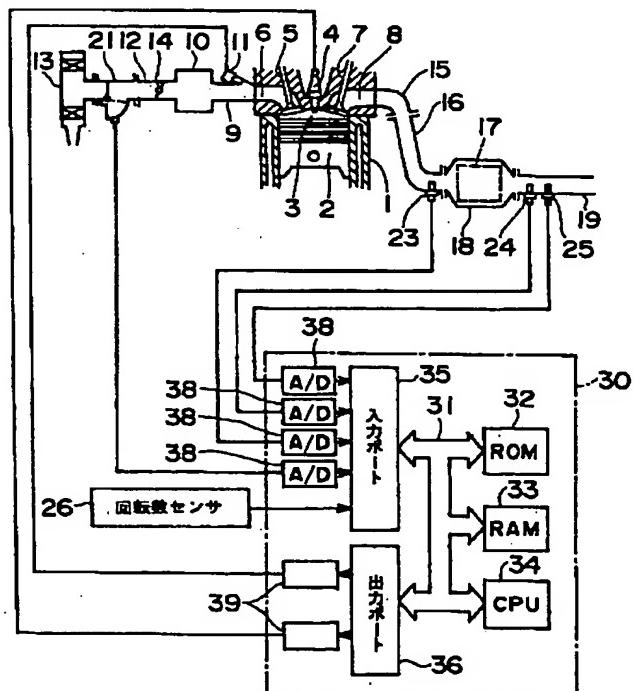
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(54)【発明の名称】 内燃機関の排気浄化装置

(57)【要約】

【課題】 吸収還元型NO_x触媒のSO_x脱離処理の実行時期を最適に制御する。

【解決手段】 希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関の排気管16に吸収還元型NO_x触媒17を備えた内燃機関の排気浄化装置において、NO_x触媒17の上流に入ガスSO_xセンサ23を設け、下流に出ガスSO_xセンサ24を設ける。入ガスSO_xセンサ23で検出した入ガスSO_x濃度と出ガスSO_xセンサ24で検出した出ガスSO_x濃度に基づいてNO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量を算出し、SO_x蓄積量が所定値以上になったときにSO_x脱離処理を実行し、SO_x脱離処理中にSO_x蓄積量が所定値以下になったときにSO_x脱離処理を終了する。



【特許請求の範囲】

【請求項1】 (イ) 希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関の排気通路に設けられ、流入する排気ガスの空燃比がリーンのときにNO_xを吸収し流入する排気ガスの酸素濃度が低いときに吸収したNO_xを放出するNO_x吸収材と、(ロ)前記NO_x吸収材の下流の排気通路に設けられ、排気ガスのSO_x濃度を検出するSO_x濃度検出手段と、(ハ)前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されたSO_xを脱離するときに排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比あるいはリッチ空燃比に制御する排気空燃比制御手段と、
を備え、前記SO_x濃度検出手段により検出されたNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度に基づいて前記排気空燃比制御手段を作動することを特徴とする内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項2】 前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度と前記SO_x濃度検出手段で検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度の濃度差に基づいて前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段を備え、このSO_x蓄積量算出手段により算出されたSO_x蓄積量が所定量に達したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を開始することを特徴とする請求項1に記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項3】 前記SO_x濃度検出手段により検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度が上昇中であって、前記NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度に所定値まで接近したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を開始することを特徴とする請求項1に記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項4】 前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度と前記SO_x濃度検出手段で検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度の濃度差に基づいて前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段を備え、このSO_x蓄積量算出手段により算出されたSO_x蓄積量が所定量以下のときには、前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を禁止することを特徴とする請求項3に記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項5】 前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度と前記SO_x濃度検出手段で検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度の濃度差に基づいて前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段を備え、このSO_x蓄積量算出手段により算出されたSO_x蓄積量の大きさに応じて、前記排気空燃比制御手段の空燃比制御条件を補正することを特徴とする請求項3に記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項6】 前記SO_x濃度検出手段により検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度が下降中であって、前記NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度に所定値まで接近したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を終了することを特徴とする請求項1または3に記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項7】 前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度は、NO_x吸収材の上流の排気通路に設けたSO_x濃度検出手段により検出することを特徴とする請求項2から6のいずれかに記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【請求項8】 前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度は、内燃機関の運転状態から推定することを特徴とする請求項2から6のいずれかに記載の内燃機関の排気净化装置。

【発明の詳細な説明】

【0001】

10 【発明の属する技術分野】 本発明は、希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関より排出される排気ガスから窒素酸化物(NO_x)を浄化することができる排気净化装置に関するものである。

【0002】

【従来の技術】 希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関より排出される排気ガスからNO_xを浄化する排気净化装置として、吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒に代表されるNO_x吸収材がある。NO_x吸収材は、流入排気ガスの空燃比がリーン(即ち、酸素過剰空気下)のときにNO_xを吸収し、流入排気

20 ガスの酸素濃度が低下したときに吸収したNO_xを放出するものであり、このNO_x吸収材の一種である吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒は、流入排気ガスの空燃比がリーン(即ち、酸素過剰空気下)のときにNO_xを吸収し、流入排気ガスの酸素濃度が低下したときに吸収したNO_xを放出しN₂に還元する触媒である。

【0003】 この吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒(以下、単に触媒あるいはNO_x触媒ということもある)を希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関の排気通路に配置すると、リーン空燃比の排気ガスが流れたときには排気ガス中のNO_xが触媒に

30 吸收され、ストイキ(理論空燃比)あるいはリッチ空燃比の排気ガスが流れたときに触媒に吸収されていたNO_xがNO₂として放出され、さらに排気ガス中のH₂CやCOなどの還元成分によってN₂に還元され、即ちNO_xが浄化される。

【0004】 ところで、一般に、内燃機関の燃料には硫黄分が含まれており、内燃機関で燃料を燃焼すると、燃料中の硫黄分が燃焼してSO₂やSO₃などの硫黄酸化物(SO_x)が発生する。前記吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒は、NO_xの吸収作用を行うのと同じメカニズムで排気ガス中のSO_xの吸収を行うので、内燃機関の排気通路にNO_x触媒を配置すると、このNO_x触媒にはNO_xのみならずSO_xも吸収される。

【0005】 ところが、前記NO_x触媒に吸収されたSO_xは時間経過とともに安定な硫酸塩を形成するため、分解、放出されにくく触媒内に蓄積され易い傾向がある。NO_x触媒内のSO_x蓄積量が増大すると、触媒のNO_x吸収容量が減少するためNO_x浄化率が低下する。これが所謂SO_x被毒である。吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒のNO_x浄化能を長期に亘って高く維持するためには、NO_x触媒に対しSO_x脱離処理を実行し、吸収されているSO_x

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を脱離させる必要があり、このSO_x脱離処理の実行時期が非常に重要になる。

【0006】

【発明が解決しようとする課題】ここで、SO_x脱離処理実行時期の決定方法の一つとして、NO_x触媒に所定量のSO_xが蓄積されたときとする考え方がある。この場合、従来は、特許番号第2745985号の特許公報等に開示されているように、NO_x触媒に吸収されているSO_x蓄積量を、車両の走行距離、あるいは、NO_x触媒の入口と出口のNO_x濃度差、あるいは、NO_x触媒の入口と出口の温度差などに基づいて推定していた。つまり、従来は、SO_xに関する直接的なデータに基づいてSO_x脱離処理実行時期を決定していたわけではなかった。

【0007】そのため、NO_x触媒に吸収されているSO_x蓄積量の把握が不十分で、SO_x脱離処理実行時期が不適切になる虞れがあった。本発明はこのような従来の技術の問題点に鑑みてなされたものであり、本発明が解決しようとする課題は、吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒の出口の排気ガスのSO_x濃度に基づいてSO_x脱離処理を管理することにより、長期に亘って吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒のNO_x浄化能力を高く維持することにある。

【0008】

【課題を解決するための手段】本発明は前記課題を解決するために、以下の手段を採用した。本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置は、(イ)希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関の排気通路に設けられ、流入する排気ガスの空燃比がリーンのときにNO_xを吸収し流入する排気ガスの酸素濃度が低いときに吸収したNO_xを放出するNO_x吸収材と、(ロ)前記NO_x吸収材の下流の排気通路に設けられ、排気ガスのSO_x濃度を検出するSO_x濃度検出手段と、(ハ)前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されたSO_xを脱離するときに排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比あるいはリッチ空燃比に制御する排気空燃比制御手段と、を備え、前記SO_x濃度検出手段により検出されたNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度に基づいて前記排気空燃比制御手段を作動することを特徴とする。

【0009】SO_x濃度検出手段によってNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度を検出しているので、NO_x吸収材のSO_x被毒の進行状態を的確に把握することができる。そして、SO_x濃度検出手段によって検出されたSO_x濃度に基づいて排気空燃比制御手段を作動しているので、NO_x吸収材に対して最適なSO_x脱離処理を実行することができる。

【0010】本発明における希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関としては、筒内直接噴射式のリーンバーンガソリンエンジンやディーゼルエンジンを例示することができる。排気ガスの空燃比とは、機関吸気通路及びNO_x吸収材よりも上流での排気通路内に供給された空気及び燃料(炭化水素)の比をいう。

【0011】内燃機関がリーンバーンガソリンエンジンの場合には、排気空燃比制御手段は、燃焼室に供給される混合気の空燃比を制御する手段により実行可能である。また、内燃機関がディーゼルエンジンの場合には、排気空燃比制御手段は、吸気行程または膨張行程または排気行程で燃料を噴射する所謂副噴射を制御する手段、あるいは、NO_x吸収材よりも上流の排気通路内に還元剤を供給制御する手段により実現可能である。

【0012】NO_x吸収材としては、吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒を例示することができる。吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒は、流入する排気ガスの空燃比がリーンのときにNO_xを吸収し、流入する排気ガス中の酸素濃度が低下すると吸収したNO_xを放出し、N₂に還元する触媒である。この吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒は、例えばアルミナを担体とし、この担体上に例えばカリウムK、ナトリウムNa、リチウムLi、セシウムCsのようなアルカリ金属、バリウムBa、カルシウムCaのようなアルカリ土類、ランタンLa、イットリウムYのような希土類から選ばれた少なくとも一つと、白金Ptのような貴金属とが担持されてなる。

【0013】本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置においては、前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度と前記SO_x濃度検出手段で検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度の濃度差に基づいて前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段を備え、このSO_x蓄積量算出手段により算出されたSO_x蓄積量が所定量に達したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を開始するようになることができる。

【0014】NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度よりも大きい場合、その濃度差分がNO_x吸収材に吸収されると考えることができる。したがって、この濃度差に排気ガス量を乗ずればNO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量(SO_x蓄積量)を算出することができる。

【0015】本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置においては、前記SO_x濃度検出手段により検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度が上昇中であって、前記NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度に所定値まで接近したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を開始するようになることができる。NO_x吸収材のSO_x蓄積量が飽和状態に近付くにしたがって、NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度に近付いていくからであり、NO_x吸収材のSO_x蓄積量を算出しなくても、SO_x被毒の進行状態を把握することができる。

【0016】また、この場合、前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度と前記SO_x濃度検出手段で検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度の濃度差に基づいて前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段を備え、このSO_x蓄積量算出手段により算出され

たSO_x蓄積量が所定量以下のときには、前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を禁止するのが好ましい。NO_x吸収材のSO_x蓄積量が少ない状態で排気空燃比制御手段を作動させても、NO_x吸収材からSO_xを効率的に脱離することができず、還元剤が無駄になるからである。

【0017】本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置において、NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度に所定値まで接近したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を開始するようにした場合には、前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度と前記SO_x濃度検出手段で検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度の濃度差に基づいて前記NO_x吸収材に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段を備え、このSO_x蓄積量算出手段により算出されたSO_x蓄積量の大きさに応じて、前記排気空燃比制御手段の空燃比制御条件を補正してもよい。SO_x蓄積量の大きさに応じて最適なSO_x脱離条件があるからである。ここでいう空燃比制御条件とは、空燃比のリッチ度合やリッチ空燃比継続時間などである。

【0018】本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置においては、前記SO_x濃度検出手段により検出したNO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度が下降中であって、前記NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度がNO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度に所定値まで接近したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を終了するようにすることが可能である。NO_x吸収材からSO_xが脱離しているとき、SO_xの脱離が完全に完了する前に排気空燃比をリッチからリーンに切り替える、リーンに切り替わってからしばらくの期間はNO_x吸収材からSO_xが脱離するからである。これにより、SO_x脱離のための還元剤の使用量を減らすことができる。

【0019】本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置において、前記NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度は、NO_x吸収材の上流の排気通路に設けたSO_x濃度検出手段により検出することもできるし、内燃機関の運転状態から推定することも可能である。NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度も考慮することにより、SO_x被毒の進行状態をより精度良く把握することができる。

【0020】

【発明の実施の形態】以下、本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置の実施の形態を図1から図8の図面に基いて説明する。

【0021】〔第1の実施の形態〕図1は本発明を希薄燃焼可能な車両用ガソリンエンジンに適用した場合の概略構成を示す図である。この図において、符号1は機関本体、符号2はピストン、符号3は燃焼室、符号4は点火栓、符号5は吸気弁、符号6は吸気ポート、符号7は排気弁、符号8は排気ポートを夫々示す。

【0022】吸気ポート6は対応する枝管9を介してサ

ージタンク10に連結され、各枝管9には夫々吸気ポート6内に向けて燃料を噴射する燃料噴射弁11が取り付けられている。サージタンク10は吸気ダクト12およびエアフローメータ21を介してエアクリーナ13に連結され、吸気ダクト12内にはスロットル弁14が配置されている。

【0023】一方、排気ポート8は排気マニホールド15および排気管16を介して吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒(NO_x吸収材)17を内蔵したケーシング18に接続され、ケーシング18は排気管19を介して図示しないマフラーに接続されている。尚、以下の説明では、吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒17をNO_x触媒17と略す。

【0024】エンジンコントロール用の電子制御ユニット(ECU)30はデジタルコンピュータからなり、双方向バス31によって相互に接続されたROM(リードオンリメモリ)32、RAM(ランダムアクセスメモリ)33、CPU(セントラルプロセッサユニット)34、入力ポート35、出力ポート36を具備する。エアフローメータ21は吸入空気量に比例した出力電圧を発生し、この出力電圧がAD変換器38を介して入力ポート35に入力される。

【0025】ケーシング18の上流の排気管16には、NO_x触媒17に流入する排気ガスのSO_x濃度に比例した出力電圧を発生する入ガスSO_xセンサ(NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度検出手段)23が設けられ、ケーシング18の下流の排気管19には、NO_x触媒17から流出する排気ガスのSO_x濃度に比例した出力電圧を発生する出ガスSO_xセンサ(NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度検出手段)24が設けられている。これらSO_xセンサ23、24の出力電圧はそれぞれ対応するAD変換器38を介して入力ポート35に入力される。

【0026】ケーシング18の下流の排気管19内には排気ガスの温度に比例した出力電圧を発生する温度センサ25が取り付けられており、この温度センサ25の出力電圧が対応するAD変換器38を介して入力ポート35に入力される。また、入力ポート35には機関回転数を表す出力パルスを発生する回転数センサ26が接続されている。出力ポート36は対応する駆動回路39を介して夫々点火栓4および燃料噴射弁11に接続されている。

【0027】このガソリンエンジンでは、例えば次式に基づいて燃料噴射時間TAUが算出される。

$$TAU = TP \cdot K$$

ここで、TPは基本燃料噴射時間を示しており、Kは補正係数を示している。基本燃料噴射時間TPは機関シリンドラ内に供給される混合気の空燃比を理論空燃比とするのに必要な燃料噴射時間を示している。この基本燃料噴射時間TPは予め実験により求められ、機関負荷Q/N(吸入空気量Q/機関回転数N)および機関回転数Nの関数として図2に示すようなマップの形で予めROM3

2内に記憶されている。補正係数Kは機関シリンダ内に供給される混合気の空燃比を制御するための係数であって、 $K = 1.0$ であれば機関シリンダ内に供給される混合気は理論空燃比となる。これに対して $K < 1.0$ になれば機関シリンダ内に供給される混合気の空燃比は理論空燃比よりも大きくなり、即ちリーンとなり、 $K > 1.0$ になれば機関シリンダ内に供給される混合気の空燃比は理論空燃比よりも小さくなり、即ちリッチとなる。

【0028】そして、この実施の形態のガソリンエンジンでは、機関低中負荷運転領域では補正係数Kの値が1.0よりも小さい値とされてリーン空燃比制御が行われ、機関高負荷運転領域、エンジン始動時の暖機運転時、加速時、高速の定速運転時では補正係数Kの値が1.0とされてストイキ制御が行われ、機関全負荷運転領域では補正係数Kの値は1.0よりも大きな値とされてリッチ空燃比制御が行われるように設定してある。

【0029】内燃機関では通常、低中負荷運転される頻度が最も高く、したがって運転期間中の大部分において補正係数Kの値が1.0よりも小さくされて、リーン混合気が燃焼せしめられることになる。

【0030】図3は燃焼室3から排出される排気ガス中の代表的な成分の濃度を概略的に示している。この図からわかるように、燃焼室3から排出される排気ガス中の未燃HC、COの濃度は燃焼室3内に供給される混合気の空燃比がリッチになるほど増大し、燃焼室3から排出される排気ガス中の酸素O₂の濃度は燃焼室3内に供給される混合気の空燃比がリーンになるほど増大する。

【0031】ケーシング18内に収容されているNO_x触媒（吸蔵還元型NO_x触媒）17は、例えばアルミナを担体とし、この担体上に例えばカリウムK、ナトリウムNa、リチウムLi、セシウムCsのようなアルカリ金属、バリウムBa、カルシウムCaのようなアルカリ土類、ランタンLa、イットリウムYのような希土類から選ばれた少なくとも一つと、白金Ptのような貴金属とが担持されてなる。

【0032】このNO_x触媒17を機関の排気通路に配置すると、NO_x触媒17は、流入する排気ガスの空燃比（以下、排気空燃比ということもある）がリーンのときにはNO_xを吸収し、流入排気ガス中の酸素濃度が低下すると吸収したNO_xを放出するNO_xの吸放出作用を行う。ここで、排気空燃比とは、機関吸気通路およびNO_x触媒17より上流の排気通路内に供給された空気および燃料（炭化水素）の比をいう。

【0033】なお、NO_x触媒17より上流の排気通路内に燃料（炭化水素）あるいは空気が供給されない場合には、排気空燃比は燃焼室3内に供給される混合気の空燃比に一致し、したがってこの場合には、NO_x触媒17は燃焼室3内に供給される混合気の空燃比がリーンのときにはNO_xを吸収し、燃焼室3内に供給される混合気中の酸素濃度が低下すると吸収したNO_xを放出する

ことになる。

【0034】NO_x触媒17によるNO_xの吸放出作用は図4に示すようなメカニズムで行われているものと考えられる。以下、このメカニズムについて担体上に白金PtおよびバリウムBaを担持させた場合を例にとって説明するが、他の貴金属、アルカリ金属、アルカリ土類、希土類を用いても同様なメカニズムとなる。

【0035】まず、流入排気ガスがかなりリーンになると流入排気ガス中の酸素濃度が大巾に増大し、図4

- 10 (A)に示されるように酸素O₂がO₂⁻又はO²⁻の形で白金Ptの表面に付着する。一方、流入排気ガスに含まれるNOは、白金Ptの表面上でO₂⁻又はO²⁻と反応し、NO₂となる(2NO+O₂→2NO₂)。

【0036】次いで、生成されたNO₂の一部は、白金Pt上で酸化されつつNO_x触媒17内に吸収されて酸化バリウムBaOと結合しながら、図4(A)に示されるように硝酸イオンNO₃⁻の形でNO_x触媒17内に拡散する。このようにしてNO_xがNO_x触媒17内に吸収される。

- 20 【0037】流入排気ガス中の酸素濃度が高い限り白金Ptの表面でNO₂が生成され、NO_x触媒17のNO_x吸収能力が飽和しない限り、NO₂がNO_x触媒17内に吸収されて硝酸イオンNO₃⁻が生成される。

【0038】これに対して、流入排気ガス中の酸素濃度が低下してNO₂の生成量が低下すると反応が逆方向(NO₃⁻→NO₂)に進み、NO_x触媒17内の硝酸イオンNO₃⁻がNO₂またはNOの形でNO_x触媒17から放出される。即ち、流入排気ガス中の酸素濃度が低下すると、NO_x触媒17からNO_xが放出されることになる。

- 30 【0039】一方、このとき、燃焼室3内に供給される混合気がストイキまたはリッチ空燃比になると、図3に示されるように機関からは多量の未燃HC、COが排出され、これら未燃HC、COは、白金Pt上の酸素O₂⁻又はO²⁻と反応して酸化せしめられる。

- 40 【0040】また、排気空燃比が理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比になると流入排気ガス中の酸素濃度が極度に低下するためにNO_x触媒17からNO₂またはNOが放出され、このNO₂またはNOは、図4(B)に示されるように未燃HC、COと反応して還元せしめられてN₂となる。

- 【0041】即ち、流入排気ガス中のHC、COは、まず白金Pt上の酸素O₂⁻又はO²⁻とただちに反応して酸化せしめられ、次いで白金Pt上の酸素O₂⁻又はO²⁻が消費されてもまだHC、COが残っていれば、このHC、COによってNO_x触媒17から放出されたNO_xおよび流入排気ガス中のNO_xがN₂に還元せしめられる。

【0042】このようにして白金Ptの表面上にNO_xまたはNOが存在しなくなると、NO_x触媒17から次から次へとNO_xまたはNOが放出され、さらにN₂に還元せしめられる。したがって、排気空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチにすると短時間の内にNO_x触媒17からNO_xが放出されることになる。

【0043】このように、排気空燃比がリーンになるとNO_xがNO_x触媒17に吸収され、排気空燃比を理論空燃比あるいはリッチにするとNO_xがNO_x触媒17から短時間のうちに放出され、N₂に還元される。したがって、大気中へのNO_xの排出を阻止することができる。

【0044】ところで、この実施の形態では前述のように、全負荷運転時には燃焼室3内に供給される混合気がリッチとされ、また高負荷運転時等には混合気が理論空燃比とされ、低中負荷運転時には混合気がリーンとされるので、低中負荷運転時に排気ガス中のNO_xがNO_x触媒17に吸収され、全負荷運転時及び高負荷運転時等にNO_x触媒17からNO_xが放出され還元されることになる。しかしながら、全負荷運転あるいは高負荷運転等の頻度が少なく、低中負荷運転の頻度が多くその運転時間が長ければ、NO_xの放出・還元が間に合わなくななり、NO_x触媒17のNO_xの吸収能力が飽和してNO_xを吸収できなくなってしまう。

【0045】そこで、この実施の形態では、リーン混合気の燃焼が行われている場合、即ち中低負荷運転を行っているときには、比較的に短い周期でスパイク的（短時間）にストイキまたはリッチ混合気の燃焼が行われるよう混合気の空燃比を制御し、短周期的にNO_xの放出・還元を行っている。このようにNO_xの吸放出のためには、排気空燃比（この実施の形態では混合気の空燃比）が比較的に短い周期で「リーン」と「スパイク的な理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比（リッチスパイク）」を交互に繰り返されるように制御することを、リーン・リッチスパイク制御と称している。尚、この出願においては、リーン・リッチスパイク制御はリーン空燃比制御に含まれるものとする。

【0046】一方、燃料には硫黄（S）が含まれており、燃料中の硫黄が燃焼するとSO₂やSO₃などの硫黄酸化物（SO_x）が発生し、NO_x触媒17は排気ガス中のこれらSO_xも吸収する。NO_x触媒17のSO_x吸収メカニズムはNO_x吸収メカニズムと同じであると考えられる。即ち、NO_xの吸収メカニズムを説明したときと同様に担体上に白金PtおよびバリウムBaを担持させた場合を例にとって説明すると、前述したように、排気空燃比がリーンのときには、酸素O₂がO⁻又はO²⁻の形でNO_x触媒17の白金Ptの表面に付着しており、流入排気ガス中のSO_x（例えばSO₂）は白金Ptの表面上で酸化されてSO₃となる。

【0047】その後、生成されたSO₃は、白金Ptの表面で更に酸化されながらNO_x触媒17内に吸収され

て酸化バリウムBaOと結合し、硫酸イオンSO₄²⁻の形でNO_x触媒17内に拡散し硫酸塩BaSO₄を形成する。このBaSO₄は結晶が粗大化し易く、比較的安定し易いため、一旦生成されると分解・脱離されにくい。そして、NO_x触媒17中のBaSO₄の生成量が増大するとNO_x触媒17の吸収に関与できるBaOの量が減少してNO_xの吸収能力が低下してしまう。これが即ちSO_x被毒である。したがって、NO_x触媒17のNO_x吸収能力を高く維持するためには、適宜のタイミングでNO_x触媒17に吸収されたSO_xを脱離させるSO_x脱離処理を実行する必要がある。

【0048】NO_x触媒17からSO_xを脱離させるためには、流入する排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比にする必要があり、また、NO_x触媒17の触媒床温が高いほど脱離し易いことがわかっている。

【0049】そして、この実施の形態では、SO_x脱離処理のために排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比にする場合も、燃料噴射弁11から噴射される燃料量をECU30により制御して燃焼室3に供給される混合気の空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比に制御することにより行う。よって、ECU30と燃料噴射弁11は排気空燃比制御手段を構成する。

【0050】図5は、NO_xの吸放出・還元処理のためにリーン・リッチスパイク制御を行っているときと、SO_x脱離処理のためにストイキまたはリッチ空燃比制御を行っているときにおける、①排気空燃比、②NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量、③NO_x触媒17の上流及び下流のSO_x濃度の経時変化の一例を示している。尚、この図において、NO_x吸放出・還元処理時の排気空燃比はリッチスパイクを省略してリーン表示しており、また、SO_x脱離処理時の排気空燃比におけるリッチ表示は理論空燃比を含む概念である。以下、図5を参照してSO_x蓄積量及びSO_x濃度の経時変化を説明する。

【0051】(1) t₁～t₂ NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量が少ないとリーン空燃比の排気ガスがNO_x触媒17に流れると、排気ガス中のSO_xがNO_x触媒17に吸収されるので、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量は経時的に増大していく。また、排気ガス中のSO_xがNO_x触媒17に吸収されている間、

40 NO_x触媒17の下流の排気ガス（以下、触媒出ガスという）のSO_x濃度は、NO_x触媒17の上流の排気ガス（以下、触媒入ガスという）のSO_x濃度よりも低い。

【0052】(2) t₂～t₃

NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量が増大してSO_x吸収容量が減少してくると、触媒出ガスのSO_x濃度が触媒入ガスのSO_x濃度に徐々に接近してくる。これは、NO_x触媒17で吸収されずにスルーパスするSO_xが徐々に増大することを意味し、その結果、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量の増大度合が鈍ってくる。

50 【0053】(3) t₃～t₄

t_3 において、 NO_x 触媒17から SO_x を脱離させるために高温・リッチ空燃比制御（空燃比一定）を開始すると、 NO_x 触媒17から脱離した SO_x が NO_x 触媒17の下流に流れ出るため、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度が触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度よりも高くなり、 NO_x 触媒17の SO_x 蓄積量は経時的に減少していく。触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度は、高温・リッチ空燃比制御を開始してから所定時間でピークを迎え、その後は徐々に減少していく。

【0054】(4) $t_4 \sim t_5$

しかしながら、 t_4 において高温・リッチ空燃比制御を終了し、リーン・リッチスバイク制御に移行した後もしばらくの間は、 NO_x 触媒17から SO_x の脱離が続く。このように高温・リッチ空燃比制御終了後も SO_x 脱離が続く理由は明らかでないが、この現象に再現性があることは多くの実験結果から明らかである。そして、 t_5 において、 NO_x 触媒17から SO_x が脱離しなくなると触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度と触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度が同等になり、このときに NO_x 触媒17の SO_x 蓄積量が最小になる。

【0055】(5) $t_5 \sim t_6$

t_5 を過ぎると、再び、 NO_x 触媒17に SO_x が吸収されるようになり、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度が触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度よりも徐々に小さくなつて、 t_6 において触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度は平衡する。

【0056】即ち、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度と触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度が一致するC点は、 SO_x 脱離状態から SO_x 吸収状態への切り替わりポイントであり、 NO_x 触媒17が排気ガス中の SO_x を吸着しているときには、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度が触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度よりも小さくなり、 NO_x 触媒17から SO_x が脱離しているときには、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度が触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度よりも大きくなる。

【0057】そして、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度が触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度よりも小さい期間（ $t_0 \sim t_3$ ）において、その SO_x 濃度差に排気ガス量を乗じると NO_x 触媒17に吸収された SO_x 量が算出され、触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度が触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度よりも大きい期間（ $t_3 \sim t_5$ ）において、その SO_x 濃度差に排気ガス量を乗じると NO_x 触媒17から脱離した SO_x 量が算出されることになる。

【0058】そこで、この第1の実施の形態では、 t_0 から NO_x 触媒17に吸収される SO_x 量を算出し、これを積算することにより SO_x 蓄積量を算出し、算出された SO_x 蓄積量が所定の上限値に達したときに、高温・リッチ空燃比制御を開始するようにした。そして、高温・リッチ空燃比制御を開始後は、 NO_x 触媒17から脱離される SO_x 量を算出し、これを前記 SO_x 蓄積量から順次減算していくことにより SO_x 脱離途中における SO_x 蓄積量を算出し、 SO_x 蓄積量が所定の下限値以下になったときに、高温・リッチ空燃比制御を終了するよう

にした。

【0059】このようにすると、 NO_x 触媒17の SO_x 蓄積量を正確に把握でき、 SO_x 脱離を最適な時期に開始することができ、リッチ空燃比の排気ガスの供給を最適な時期に終了することができる。その結果、 NO_x 触媒17の NO_x 浄化能を長期に亘って高く維持することができるとともに、 SO_x 脱離に伴う燃費悪化を低減することができる。

【0060】次に、図6を参照して、第1の実施の形態

- 10 における SO_x 脱離制御実行ルーチンを説明する。この制御ルーチンを構成する各ステップからなるフローチャートはECU30のROM32に記憶されており、この制御ルーチンは一定時間毎にCPU34によって実行される。

【0061】<ステップ101>まず、ECU30は、ステップ101において、入ガス SO_x センサ23で検出された触媒入ガスの SO_x 濃度（以下、入ガス SO_x 濃度と略称することもある）を読み込み、出ガス SO_x センサ24で検出された触媒出ガスの SO_x 濃度（以下、出ガス SO_x 濃度と略称することもある）を読み込む。

- 20 【0062】<ステップ102>次に、ECU30は、ステップ102に進んで、入ガス SO_x 濃度が出ガス SO_x 濃度よりも大きいか否か判定する。ステップ102における肯定判定は NO_x 触媒17が SO_x 吸収中であることを意味し、否定判定は NO_x 触媒17が SO_x 脱離中であることを意味する。

【0063】<ステップ103>ステップ102で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ103に進み、 SO_x 蓄積量を加算する。詳述すると、ステップ1

- 30 01で読み込んだ入ガス SO_x 濃度から出ガス SO_x 濃度を減算して SO_x 濃度差を求め、一方、エアフロメータ21で検出した現時点の吸入空気量を読み込みこれを排気ガス量として、本ルーチンを今回実行してから次回実行するまでの間に NO_x 触媒17に吸収される SO_x 量を算出し、この吸収 SO_x 量を SO_x カウンタにおいて加算し、現時点の SO_x 蓄積量を求める。

- 【0064】<ステップ104>次に、ECU30は、ステップ104に進み、 SO_x 蓄積量が予め設定した上限値を越えているか否か判定する。ステップ104で否定判定した場合には、まだ、 SO_x 脱離処理を実行すべき時期ではないので、リターンに進む。

- 【0065】<ステップ105>ステップ104で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ105に進み、 NO_x 触媒17から SO_x を脱離するために排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比に制御するリッチ空燃比制御を開始する。尚、このリッチ空燃比制御が実行されている間、適宜の手段により、 NO_x 触媒17に対する昇温制御が実行され、 NO_x 触媒17の触媒床温は SO_x 脱離に最適な温度に制御される。

- 50 【0066】<ステップ106>リッチ空燃比制御及び

昇温制御の実行により、NO_x触媒17からSO_xが脱離し、出ガスSO_x濃度が入ガスSO_x濃度よりも高くなるため、次回このルーチンを実行したときには、ステップ102において否定判定され、ECU30は、ステップ106に進み、SO_x蓄積量を減算する。

【0067】詳述すると、ステップ101で読み込んだ出ガスSO_x濃度から入ガスSO_x濃度を減算してSO_x濃度差を求め、一方、エアフロメータ21で検出した現時点の吸入空気量を読み込みこれを排気ガス量として、本ルーチンを今回実行してから次回実行するまでの間にNO_x触媒17から脱離するSO_x量を算出し、その脱離SO_x量をSO_xカウンタにおいて減算し、現時点のSO_x蓄積量を求める。

【0068】<ステップ107>次に、ECU30は、ステップ107に進み、SO_x蓄積量が予め設定した下限値以下か否かを判定する。ステップ107で否定判定した場合には、NO_x触媒17からSO_xがまだ十分に脱離していない状態であるのでリターンに進み、リッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御を続行する。

【0069】<ステップ108>ステップ107で肯定判定した場合には、NO_x触媒17からSO_xが十分に脱離したので、ECU30は、ステップ108に進み、リッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御を終了する。

【0070】この第1の実施の形態において、ECU30による一連の信号処理のうちステップ103を実行する部分は、NO_x触媒(NO_x吸収材)の上流と下流のSO_x濃度差に基づいてNO_x触媒(NO_x吸収材)に吸収されているSO_x量を算出するSO_x蓄積量算出手段といふことができる。

【0071】〔第2の実施の形態〕前述の第1の実施の形態では、NO_x触媒17の上流と下流のSO_x濃度差からNO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量を算出し、算出されたSO_x蓄積量に基づいて、SO_x脱離処理のための高温・リッチ空燃比制御の開始時期及び終了時期を判定したが、第2の実施の形態では、SO_x蓄積量を算出せずに、NO_x触媒17の上流と下流のSO_x濃度の比較値に基づいて、高温・リッチ空燃比制御の開始時期及び終了時期を判定するようにした。

【0072】前述したように、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量が増大して飽和状態に近付くと、触媒出ガスのSO_x濃度が触媒入ガスのSO_x濃度に近付いてくる(図5においてt2～t3の間)。したがって、出ガスSO_x濃度が入ガスSO_x濃度にどの程度まで接近したかで、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積程度を把握することができる。そこで、この第2の実施の形態では、出ガスSO_x濃度と入ガスSO_x濃度の比が所定の比率(例えば、1:2)になったとき(図5においてA部)に、高温・リッチ空燃比制御を開始するようにした。

【0073】また、NO_x触媒17からSO_xが脱離しているとき、SO_xの脱離が完全に完了する前に排気空燃

比をリッチからリーンに切り替えて、リーンに切り替わってからしばらくの期間はNO_x触媒17からSO_xが脱離している(図5においてt4～t5の間)。したがって、リッチ空燃比制御を実行しているときに、出ガスSO_x濃度が入ガスSO_x濃度に一致する前に、出ガスSO_x濃度が入ガスSO_x濃度に所定値まで接近したときを高温・リッチ空燃比制御の終了時期とすることができ、また、そうすることによって還元剤の使用量を減らすことができる。そこで、この第2の実施の形態では、出ガスSO_x濃度と入ガスSO_x濃度の比が所定の比率(例えば、2:1)になったとき(図5においてB部)に、高温・リッチ空燃比制御を終了するようにした。

【0074】このようにすると、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積程度を精度良く把握でき、SO_x脱離を最適な時期に開始することができる。また、リッチ空燃比の排気ガスの供給を最適な時期に終了することができる。その結果、NO_x触媒17のNO_x浄化能を長期に亘って高く維持することができるとともに、SO_x脱離に伴う燃費悪化を低減することができる。

【0075】次に、図7を参照して、第2の実施の形態におけるSO_x脱離制御実行ルーチンを説明する。この制御ルーチンを構成する各ステップからなるフローチャートはECU30のROM32に記憶されており、この制御ルーチンは一定時間毎にCPU34によって実行される。

【0076】<ステップ201>まず、ECU30は、ステップ201において、入ガスSO_xセンサ23で検出された触媒入ガスのSO_x濃度を読み込み、出ガスSO_xセンサ24で検出された触媒出ガスのSO_x濃度を読み込む。

【0077】<ステップ202>次に、ECU30は、ステップ202に進んで、入ガスSO_x濃度が出ガスSO_x濃度よりも大きいか否か判定する。ステップ202における肯定判定はNO_x触媒17がSO_x吸収中であることを意味し、否定判定はNO_x触媒17がSO_x脱離中であることを意味する。

【0078】<ステップ203>ステップ202で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ203に進み、出ガスSO_x濃度が上昇中か否か判定する。図5に示すように、NO_x触媒17がSO_x脱離状態からSO_x吸収状態に切り替わった直後は出ガスSO_x濃度が低下していく(t0～t1)、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量が飽和に近付くにしたがって出ガスSO_x濃度は上昇していく(t2～t3)。ステップ203ではNO_x触媒17がこのいずれの状態にあるかを判定する。ステップ203において否定判定した場合には、まだSO_x脱離処理の開始時期ではないので、ECU30はリターンに進む。

【0079】<ステップ204>ステップ203において肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ20

4に進み、出ガスSO_x濃度と入ガスSO_x濃度の濃度比 α を算出する。

$$\alpha = (\text{出ガスSO}_x\text{濃度}) / (\text{入ガスSO}_x\text{濃度})$$

【0080】<ステップ205>次に、ECU30は、ステップ205に進み、ステップ204で算出した濃度比 α が上限値（例えば、0.5）よりも大きいか否かを判定する。ステップ205で否定判定した場合には、まだ、SO_x脱離処理を実行すべき時期ではないので、ECU30はリターンに進む。

【0081】<ステップ206>ステップ205で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ206に進み、NO_x触媒17からSO_xを脱離するために排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比に制御するリッチ空燃比制御を開始する。尚、このリッチ空燃比制御が実行されている間、適宜の手段により、NO_x触媒17に対する昇温制御が実行され、NO_x触媒17の触媒床温はSO_x脱離に最適な温度に制御される。

【0082】<ステップ207>リッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御の実行により、NO_x触媒17からSO_xが脱離し、出ガスSO_x濃度が入ガスSO_x濃度よりも高くなるため、次回このルーチンを実行したときには、ステップ202において否定判定され、ECU30は、ステップ207に進む。

【0083】ステップ207において、ECU30は、出ガスSO_x濃度が下降中か否か判定する。図5に示すように、リッチ空燃比制御開始からしばらくの間は出ガスSO_x濃度が上昇していき、やがてピーク値を迎える。その後は出ガスSO_x濃度が下降していく（t₃～t₄）。ステップ207ではNO_x触媒17がこのいずれの状態にあるかを判定する。

【0084】ステップ207において否定判定した場合には、まだリッチ空燃比制御を終了すべきではないので、ECU30はリターンに進み、リッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御を続行する。

【0085】<ステップ208>ステップ207において肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ208に進み、出ガスSO_x濃度と入ガスSO_x濃度の濃度比 α を算出する。

$$\alpha = (\text{出ガスSO}_x\text{濃度}) / (\text{入ガスSO}_x\text{濃度})$$

【0086】<ステップ209>次に、ECU30は、ステップ209に進み、ステップ208で算出した濃度比 α が下限値（例えば、2）よりも小さいか否かを判定する。ステップ209で否定判定した場合には、まだ、リッチ空燃比制御を終了すべきではないので、ECU30はリターンに進み、リッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御を続行する。

【0087】<ステップ210>ステップ209で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ210に進み、SO_x脱離処理のためのリッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御を終了する。

【0088】【第3の実施の形態】前述の第2の実施の形態では、NO_x触媒17の上流と下流のSO_x濃度の濃度比に基づいて、高温・リッチ空燃比制御の開始時期及を判定しているが、NO_x触媒17に流入する排気ガスのSO_x濃度が低い場合には、前記SO_x濃度比が所定の条件を満たしてもNO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量としては少ないこともある。このように、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量が少ない状態で高温・リッチ空燃比制御を実行しても、NO_x触媒17からSO_xが効率的に脱離されず、還元剤が無駄に消費されてしまう。

【0089】そこで、この第3の実施の形態では、NO_x触媒17のSO_x蓄積量が所定量に達していない場合には、SO_x脱離処理の実行を禁止し、SO_x蓄積量が所定量以上であり、且つ、NO_x触媒17の上流と下流のSO_x濃度比が所定の条件を満たした場合に限り、SO_x脱離処理を実行することとした。

【0090】次に、図8を参照して、第3の実施の形態におけるSO_x脱離制御実行ルーチンを説明する。この制御ルーチンを構成する各ステップからなるフローチャートはECU30のROM32に記憶されており、この制御ルーチンは一定時間毎にCPU34によって実行される。

【0091】<ステップ301～302>ステップ301、302はそれぞれ第2の実施の形態におけるステップ201、202と同じであるので説明を省略する。

【0092】ステップ302で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ303に進み、SO_x蓄積量を加算する。詳述すると、ステップ101で読み込んだ入ガスSO_x濃度から出ガスSO_x濃度を減算してSO_x濃度差を求め、一方、エアフローメータ21で検出した現時点の吸入空気量を読み込みこれを排気ガス量として、本ルーチンを今回実行してから次回実行するまでの間にNO_x触媒17に吸収されるSO_x量を算出し、この吸収SO_x量をSO_xカウンタにおいて加算し、現時点のSO_x蓄積量を求める。

【0093】<ステップ304>次に、ECU30は、ステップ304に進み、SO_x蓄積量が予め設定したSO_x脱離実行下限値を越えているか否か判定する。ステップ304で否定判定した場合には、まだ、SO_x脱離処理を実行すべき時期ではないので、リターンに進む。

【0094】<ステップ305～ステップ311>ステップ304で肯定判定した場合には、ECU30は、ステップ305に進む。ステップ305からステップ311は第2の実施の形態におけるステップ204からステップ210と同じであるので説明を省略する。

【0095】尚、第2の実施の形態における制御ルーチンのステップ203に対応する処理が、第3の実施の形態の制御ルーチンにはないのは、ステップ304においてSO_x蓄積量がSO_x脱離実行下限値以上である時には、出ガスSO_x濃度が下降する期間（図5においてt₀～t₁

1) を既に過ぎているはずだからである。

【0096】<ステップ312>ECU30は、ステップ311においてリッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御を終了した後、ステップ312に進み、SOxカウンタをリセットして本ルーチンを終了する。

【0097】この第3の実施の形態において、ECU30による一連の信号処理のうちステップ303を実行する部分は、NOx触媒(NOx吸収材)の上流と下流のSOx濃度差に基づいてNOx触媒(NOx吸収材)に吸収されているSOx量を算出するSOx蓄積量算出手段といふことができる。

【0098】〔他の実施の形態〕前述の第2、第3の実施の形態では、リッチ空燃比制御及び昇温制御の終了時期の判定を、出ガスSOx濃度と入ガスSOx濃度の比 α が所定の条件($\alpha < 2$)を満たすか否かで行っているが、これに代えて、リッチ空燃比制御を開始してからの経過時間が所定の時間に達したか否かによって前記終了時期を判定してもよい。

【0099】また、上述のようにリッチ空燃比制御の終了時期を経過時間で判定する場合には、SOx脱離処理開始前までのSOx蓄積量を算出し、そのSOx蓄積量の大きさに応じて、リッチ度合やリッチ空燃比継続時間等のSOx脱離処理条件(排気空燃比制御手段の空燃比制御条件)を補正して、SOx脱離処理のためのリッチ空燃比制御を実行することも可能である。

【0100】前述の各実施の形態では、NOx触媒17の上流に入ガスSOxセンサ23を設け、この入ガスSOxセンサ23によりNOx触媒17に流入する排気ガスのSOx濃度を検出しているが、NOx触媒17に流入する排気ガスのSOx濃度は燃料量と排気ガス量に依存するので、エンジン運転状態(燃料噴射量、空燃比、吸入空気量、エンジン回転数など)から推定することが可能である。したがって、入ガスSOxセンサ23を設ける代わりに、エンジン運転状態からECU30により触媒入ガスのSOx濃度を算出し、推定するようにしてもよい。

【0101】前述した各実施の形態では本発明をガソリンエンジンに適用した例で説明したが、本発明をディーゼルエンジンに適用することができることは勿論である。ディーゼルエンジンの場合は、燃焼室での燃焼がストイキよりもはるかにリーン域で行われるので、通常の機関運転状態ではNOx触媒17に流入する排気ガスの空燃比は非常にリーンであり、NOx及びSOxの吸収は行われるもの、NOx及びSOxの放出が行われることは殆どない。

【0102】また、ガソリンエンジンの場合には、前述したように燃焼室3に供給する混合気をストイキあるいはリッチにすることにより排気空燃比をストイキあるいはリッチにし、排気ガス中の酸素濃度を低下させて、NOx触媒17に吸収されているNOxやSOxを放出させ

ることができるが、ディーゼルエンジンの場合には、燃焼室に供給する混合気をストイキあるいはリッチにすると燃焼の際に煤が発生するなどの問題があり採用することはできない。

【0103】したがって、本発明をディーゼルエンジンに適用する場合、排気空燃比をストイキあるいはリッチにするためには、機関出力を得るために燃料を燃焼するのとは別に、還元剤(例えば燃料である軽油)を排気ガス中に供給する必要がある。排気ガスへの還元剤の供給は、吸気行程や膨張行程や排気行程において気筒内に燃料を副噴射することによっても可能であるし、あるいは、NOx触媒17の上流の排気通路内に還元剤を供給することによっても可能である。

【0104】尚、ディーゼルエンジンであっても排気再循環装置(所謂、EGR装置)を備えている場合には、排気再循環ガスを多量に燃焼室に導入することによって、排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比またはリッチ空燃比にすることが可能である。

【0105】

【発明の効果】本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置によれば、(イ)希薄燃焼可能な内燃機関の排気通路に設けられたNOx吸収材と、(ロ)前記NOx吸収材の下流の排気通路に設けられたSOx濃度検出手段と、(ハ)前記NOx吸収材に吸収されたSOxを脱離するときに排気ガスの空燃比を理論空燃比あるいはリッチ空燃比に制御する排気空燃比制御手段と、を備え、前記SOx濃度検出手段により検出されたNOx吸収材下流のSOx濃度に基づいて前記排気空燃比制御手段を作動するようにしたことにより、NOx吸収材のSOx被毒の進行状態を的確に把握することができ、NOx吸収材に対して最適なSOx脱離処理を実行することができる。

【0106】SOx濃度検出手段により検出したNOx吸収材下流のSOx濃度が下降中であって、NOx吸収材下流のSOx濃度がNOx吸収材上流のSOx濃度に所定値まで接近したときに前記排気空燃比制御手段による空燃比制御を終了するようにした場合には、SOx脱離のための還元剤の使用量を減らすことができ、その結果、SOx脱離処理に起因する燃費悪化を低減することができる。

【図面の簡単な説明】

【図1】 本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置の第1の実施の形態の概略構成図である。

【図2】 基本燃料噴射時間のマップの一例を示す図である。

【図3】 機関から排出される排気ガス中の未燃HC、COおよび酸素の濃度を概略的に示す線図である。

【図4】 吸収還元型NOx触媒のNOx吸放出作用を説明するための図である。

【図5】 排気空燃比、NOx触媒のSOx蓄積量、及び、NOx触媒上流と下流のSOx濃度の経時変化を示す

図である。

【図6】 前記第1の実施の形態におけるSO_x脱離制御実行ルーチンである。

【図7】 本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置の第2の実施の形態におけるSO_x脱離制御実行ルーチンである。

【図8】 本発明に係る内燃機関の排気浄化装置の第3の実施の形態におけるSO_x脱離制御実行ルーチンである。

【符号の説明】

1 エンジン本体(内燃機関)

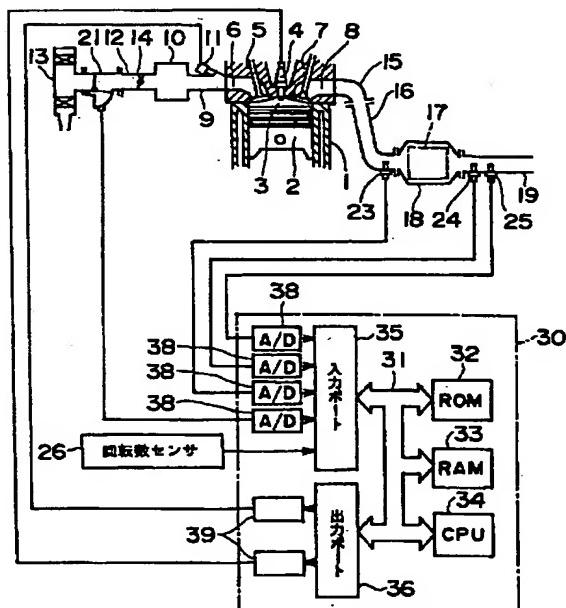
3 燃焼室

* 4 点火栓

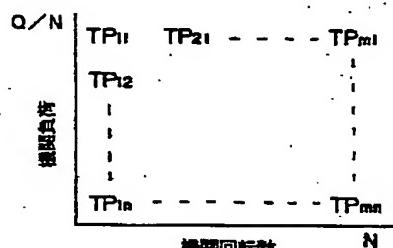
- 11 燃料噴射弁(排気空燃比制御手段)
- 16 排気管(排気通路)
- 17 吸収還元型NO_x触媒(NO_x吸収材)
- 18 ケーシング
- 19 排気管(排気通路)
- 23 入ガスSO_xセンサ(NO_x吸収材上流のSO_x濃度検出手段)
- 24 出ガスSO_xセンサ(NO_x吸収材下流のSO_x濃度検出手段)
- 10 ECU(排気空燃比制御手段)
- 30 ECU(排気空燃比制御手段)

*

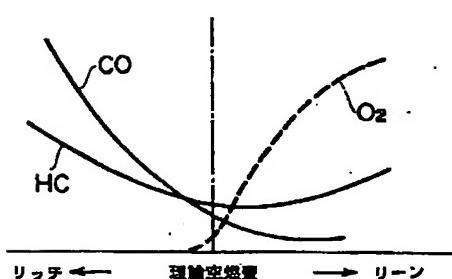
【図1】



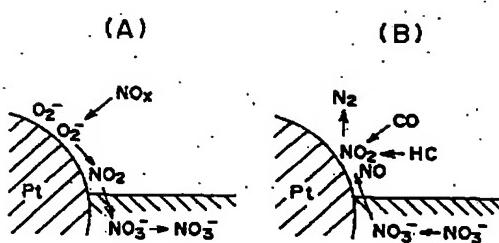
【図2】



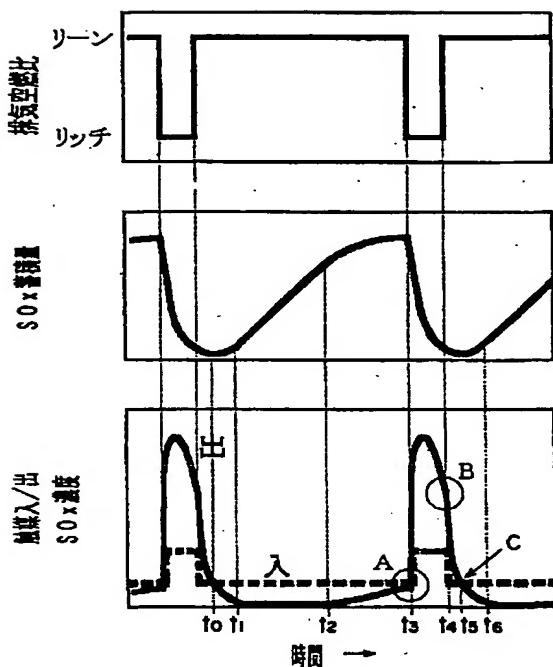
【図3】



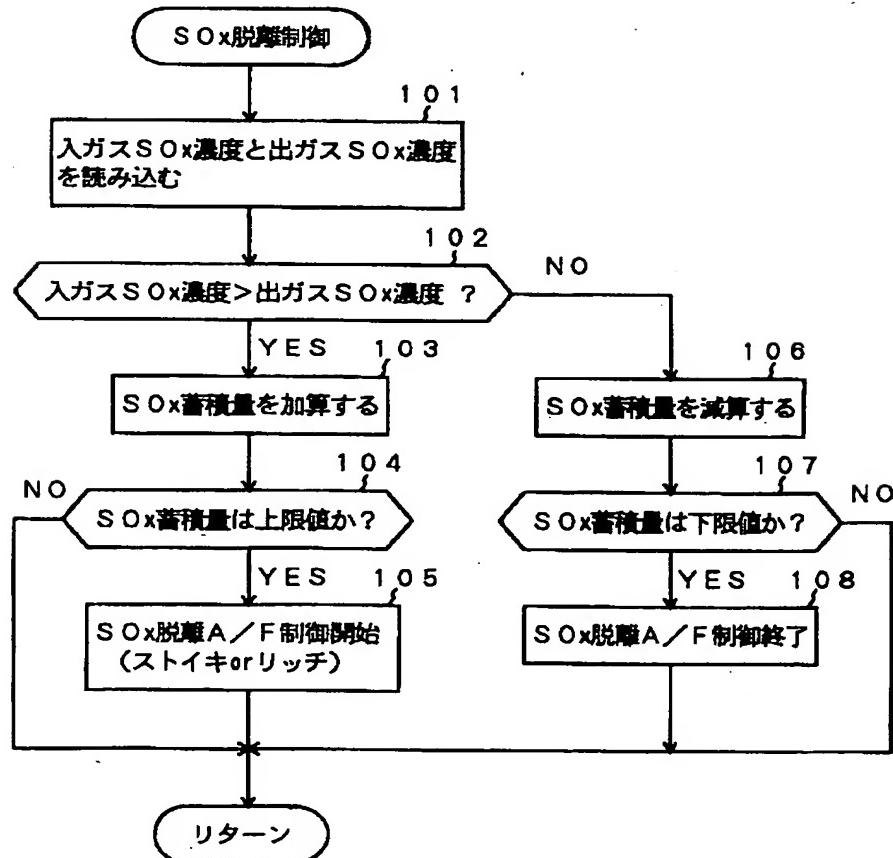
【図4】



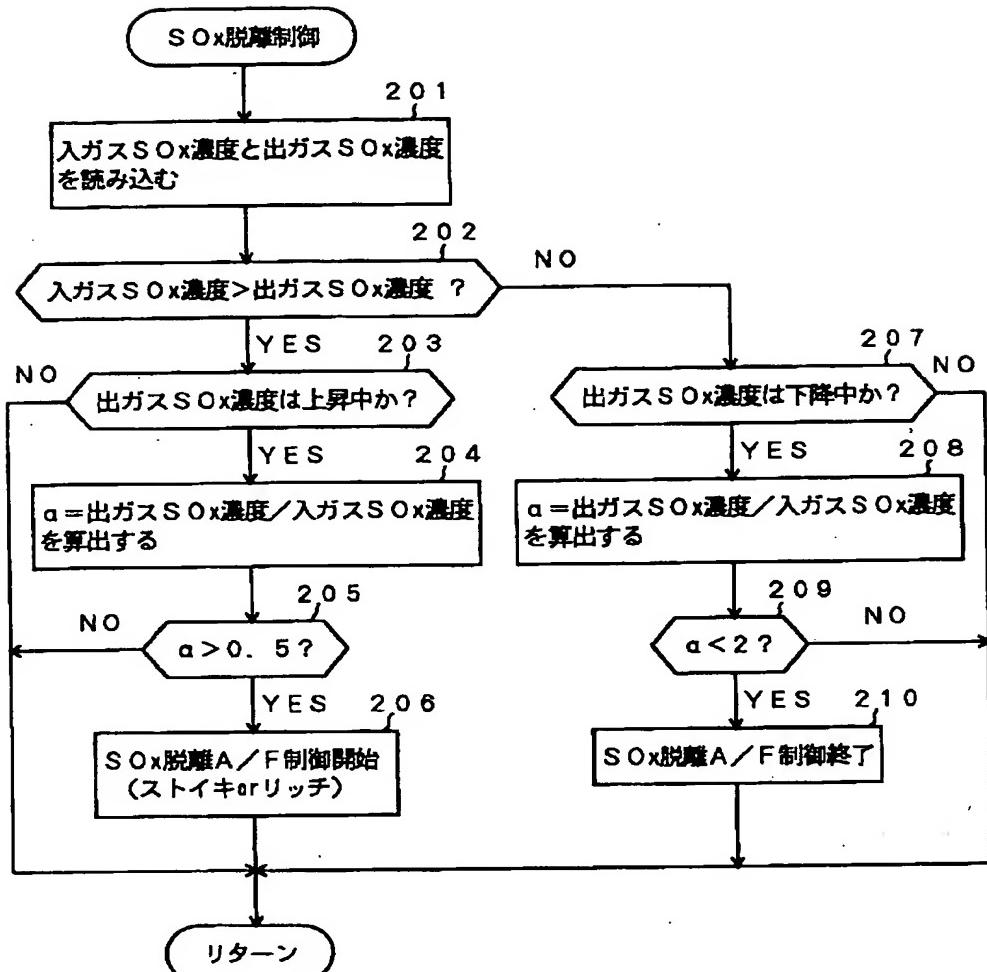
【図5】



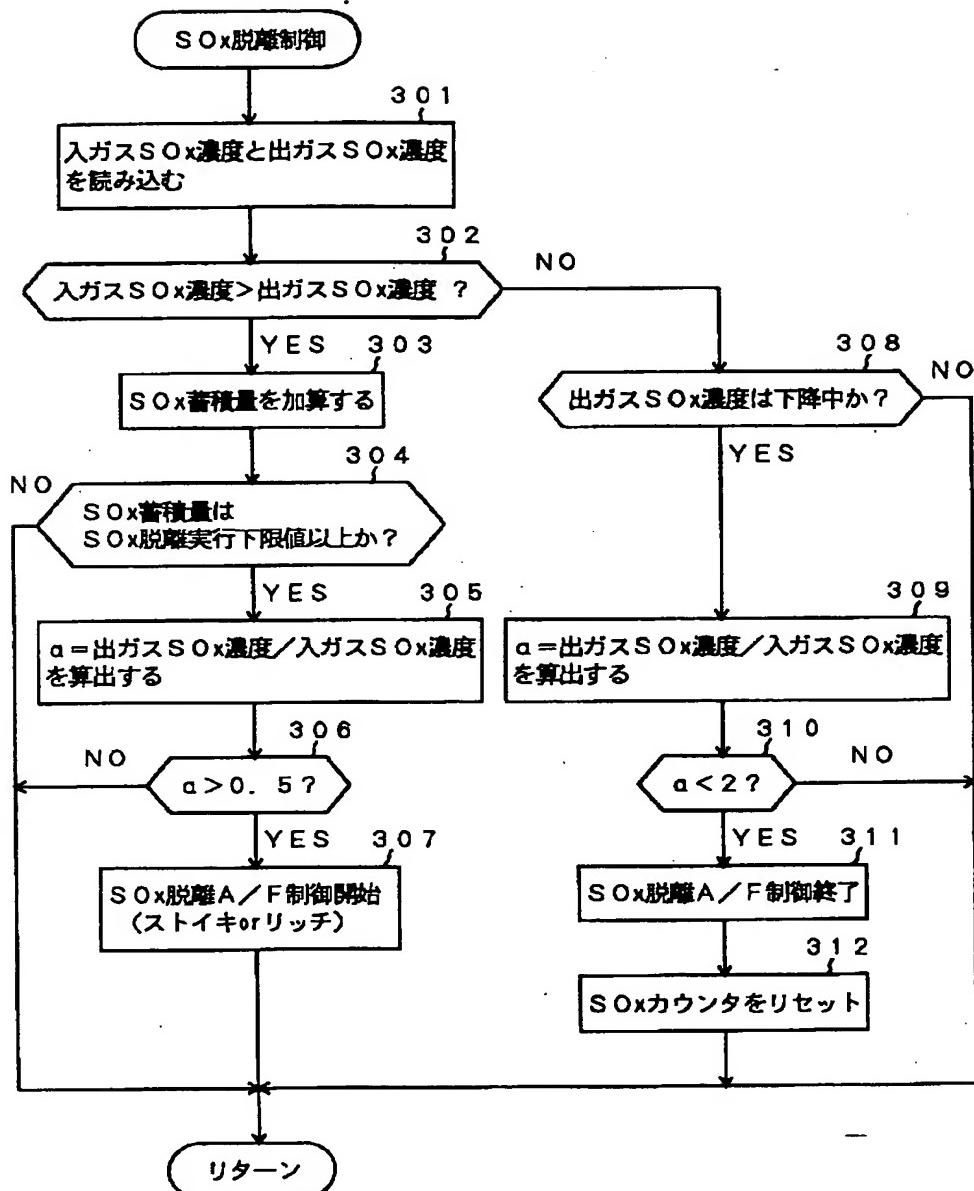
【図6】



【図7】



[図8]



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